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**NARRATIVE RESPONSES OF THE AO COMMUNITY: A
SEMIOTIC AND INTERPRETATIVE STUDY OF
*TARNUNGER OTSU***

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

WALUNIR

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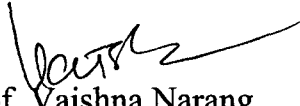
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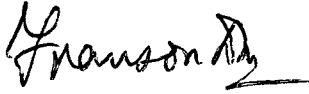


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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "NARRATIVE RESPONSES OF THE AO COMMUNITY: A SEMIOTIC AND INTERPRETATIVE STUDY OF THE *TARNUNGER OTSU*", submitted by Walunir, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is to the best of my knowledge an original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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DECLARATION

This dissertation titled "NARRATIVE RESPONSES OF THE AO COMMUNITY: A SEMIOTIC AND INTERPRETATIVE STUDY OF *TARNUNGER OTSU*", submitted by me for the award of degree of Master of philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any university.

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Ojala asoshi

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: AO COMMUNITY AND NARRATIVES

The word, 'Ao' denotes the name of community as well as their language. I shy away from the phrase, 'Ao tribe' which is a mode of conventional usage of the Aos. The argument is based on the basis of social structure, system of control, mode of belief, interdependence, and physical space. We begin our consideration by looking at the relationship, interaction and commitment of a group of people to a given place. Social interaction is an "inescapable aspect of human life. It produces organization, and organization in turn structures the interaction. It begins with the interaction of the unborn child and its environment, its mother. It continues through years of dependency, during which the child is taught the shared perspectives of its elders and peers and unwittingly makes its own commitments to the place. It continues as he emerges into adult status".¹

In the case of tribe, the scope of interaction, interdependence and commitment is limited. These levels of interactions are patterned and structured by the actions within the tribe. These structures are almost fixed with specific and organized social hierarchy with common experiences and beliefs, ways and attitudes within fixed geographical boundaries. These are defined and protected by the very community of that culture and tradition. In all these modes, a great level of closure is maintained within well-defined geographical boundary with limited physical space. The relationship of the tribal group with the local

¹ David W. Minar & Scott Greer. 1970. *The Concept of Community: Readings with Interpretations*. Butterworths London. p. 3.

environment defines and delimits social interactions and the place becomes the basis of culture and community life; the socio-political structure flows from mutual dependence on the local environment. The tribe orders the behavior of the members. The members are, to a certain extent, controlled through organized structures of control such as polity, beliefs, taboos and social norms.

The Aos during their ancestral times were confined physically and symbolically within a fixed geographical space. In this case, the term, 'tribe' goes well with the distant ancestral Aos. However, can this understanding of a social group encompass a complex and a dynamic group of people?

We are dealing with the modes of change of a group of people in various aspects of societal existence in relation to other systems and patterns of existence. For the purpose of our study, 'community' would be more appropriate. It is a more encompassing term. The term leans towards an open kind of societal existence with varieties and complexities of experiences within and without spatial limits.

By and large community control is also powerful enough to create structures which drive the members towards highly uniform behavior of its members. However, with limited control from the structure of the community, a community does not order the entire behavior of its members. It is one set of limits only. Within these limits there still "exist other structures ... and any or all of these structure may contradict, modify or destroy the controlling power of the community in specific instances".² Control and dependence is also derived from different existing structures outside the community.

² David W. Minar & Scott Greer. 1970. Op. Cit. P. 63.

In certain customary usage, community often means place. Thus, one usually answers the question of community with reference to its neighborhood – a separate physical space defined in opposition to other existing spaces. This tendency raises interesting questions about the relationship of community and physical space: a well-defined geographic boundary. Here we are up against a problem. What about population in diaspora? There are people with lived experiences and ancestral roots of a specific community settled elsewhere. In other words, what of an Ao born and brought up in Ao village migrated and settled elsewhere? What does it mean when an Ao settled in the United States of America, for that matter, anywhere, say, ‘I belong to the Ao community’?

This is not a personal instance. It is a societal phenomenon. There is a large Ao population settled away from their ancestral geographical area who continue to be referred as Aos irrespective of the place they are settled in. They exhibit a sense of belongingness and attachment to their ancestral geographical location of community. With this problem we are up to displace the traditional notion of community with a broader one.

This makes urgent the question of “whether community can exist for man in meaningful ways without the locality as a nexus of loyalties. Must community, in other words, be place oriented. We are precisely talking of a community that moves within and without physical space. We remember, of course written in a different context, Rupert Brooke saying, “... a foreign land which will be forever England”.³ From the geographical domain we approach the mental space of community. A domain of lived experience, feeling and attitude that one carries around. The community moves with the individual. A great level of interpersonal relationships, sentiment and attachment to one’s community exists with individuals in diaspora.

³ *The Soldier*. One of Robert Frost’s five ‘War Sonnets’, first published in *New Numbers* in 1915.

These assumptions give room for a dynamic study of the Ao community which will open the problems of this work towards dispersal and fluidity of ideas.

The Ao community belongs to the Naga ethnic group inhabiting some parts of South-east Asia (North-eastern India, including states of Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and some parts of western Myanmar). The territory occupied by the Aos lies between 26.12' north latitude to 26.45' north latitude and 90.45' east longitude to 94.18' east longitude.⁴ The area is about 1615 square kilometers.⁵ The Ao geographical area shares boundary with the Lotha Nagas in the west, the Sema Nagas in the south, the Sangtam Nagas in the east and the state of Assam in the north.⁶

The population of the Aos is approximately 227230: 118428 males and 108802 females; sex ratio is 912; density of population is 141 persons per square kilometer and the literacy rate is approximately 84.27: 86.14 males and 82.20 females.⁷

The physiography consists of hilly ranges, with narrow valleys, swift flowing rivers, and clear streams and springs. The climate is moderate with an average rainfall of about 200 centimeters evenly distributed all over the region. The temperature ranges between 20.c to 28.c in summer and 15.C to 20.c in winter with some local variations.

The flora and fauna are abundant. It is said that as much as two hundred species of plants can be found in an acre of forest land. The vegetation consists of

⁴ Dr. Purtongzuk Longchar. Op.cit. p.10.

⁵ Centenary Literature Committee. 1991. *History of Mokokchung, 1890 – 1990*. p.140.
B.B. Gosh. 1973. *Nagaland District Gazetteers, mokokchung District*. p.3.

⁷ Directorate of Census Operations Nagaland. 2001. *Nagaland Census Report, 2001*. Nagaland Govt. Press. pp. 9, 11,19.

tropical and sub-tropical trees. *Halang, makai, bola, hollock, alder, pensam, chestnut, detachap, oak, bamboo, and cane* forms the prominent vegetation. Plants, flowers, orchids and creepers add to the variety of the vegetation. The animal life consists of elephant, tiger, monkey, bear, deer, squirrel, and different kinds of birds. The important birds include hornbill, blythe tragopan, bulbul, hummingbird, dove and wild pigeon.

The Ao geographical land area falls within the whole district of Mokokchung. There are about eighty Ao villages divided into six different ranges namely – Asetkong, Changkikog, Japhukong, Langpangkong, Ongpangkong and Tsurangkong. Ungma is the biggest Ao village. According to an Ao legend, the early Aos settled in this place first after coming from *Chungliyimti*. Longkum, a vanguard village in their days of head hunting is situated at an altitude of 1846 meters above sea level. The Aos have an ancestral belief that Longkhum is the resting-place of the spirits of the dead on their onward journey to paradise. Mopongchukit is one of the oldest villages in the Ao region, the village that gave birth to the legendary lovers *Jina and Etiben*. Impur, the Christian mission center of Ao Baptist Church Council is situated next to this village. Molungkimong, the first village in the whole of Nagaland to embrace Christianity and to consequently give up several primitive practices including headhunting is a village connected with modern Naga history. Monuments relating to the historical inception and development of Christianity are found in this village.

The Aos are also settled in large numbers in the other districts of Nagaland. They are also settled in large numbers in the neighboring states of Nagaland and other metropolitan cities of India.

The Ao territory is well connected with transport and communication as roadways, railways, post, telegraph, telephone and internet. All the towns and villages are connected with roads. Most of the villages have access to modes of communication as post, telegraph and telephone. Because of the hilly topography, only Tuli town is connected with railway.

Basic amenities in terms of water, electricity, health and sanitation, sewage and drainage systems and public toilets are well established and managed in urban well as rural areas. Schools, libraries, recreational places (cinema, playground, park) hospitals, dispensaries are well established in the urban as well as the rural areas. The human development scenario is quite high going by these indices.

The primary occupation of the Aos is agriculture. Eighty percent of the Ao population depends on agriculture. Agriculture is carried in three forms - shifting cultivation, terrace cultivation and irrigated cultivation. Out of these, the shifting cultivation is most prominent. Terrace cultivation is practiced in a small scale in areas of low gradient of hill-slope. This type of cultivation is irrigated with water from streams and rivers. The irrigated agriculture is practiced in the low-lying areas. As the low lying areas are limited, it is practiced only in a few pockets bordering Assam. Animal rearing, hunting, fishing, horticulture, forestry, aquaculture are also quite prominent among the Aos. Secondary economic activities as small-scale industry and cottage industry as carpentry, handicraft, blacksmithy, handloom and weaving are prominent among the Aos. In the tertiary economic activity, the Aos work as office employees, doctors, teachers and lawyers.

The Aos employ two languages – English and Ao. The ‘Ao’ language is one of the Naga languages of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group.⁵ The Ao

⁵ Panger Imchen. 1990. *Ao Mongsenn Lipok*. Mongsenn Mongdang, Sariaghat Offset Press, Guwahati. pp. 15, 32.

language has several dialects out of which the *Chugnli* and *Mongsen* are the most prominent. *Chungli* is employed as the standard version of the Ao language.

Festivals are an enduring part of the rich Ao culture and, as such, mark their importance. They are celebrated with a pageantry of color, rituals and feast of music. Aos being cent percent Christians, Christmas and New Year are celebrated with great enthusiasm. These festivals are considered the most important in the modern times. Even though these festivals in the calendar year spans only for single days, the preparation and merrymaking continue the months of December and January. Other Christian events as Good Friday and Easter Sunday are also observed.

The Aos celebrate two traditional festivals - *Moatsu* and *Tsungremmong* which are considered the most important with regards to their culture and tradition. Even though they are attached to a lot of beliefs and ritualistic performances, they are not practiced having lost a lot of relevance and significance especially in the urban areas. With blends of merrymaking and traditional rites and rituals, these festivals are celebrated with nostalgia and reminiscence of the past Ao culture. These festivals revolve around agricultural cycle and are connected to agricultural operations such as sowing seeds, spring, harvest, etc.

Moatsu, the spring festival is a three-day event celebrated from the first to the third of May every year. This festival is celebrated with traditional dance, folk songs, indigenous games and tribal chants. *Tsungremmong* is celebrated as a mark of thanksgiving to the gods for helping the crops grow well. The festival spans for three days from the first to the third of August with heights of traditional colour.

So as to enhance our understanding of *tarnunggr otsu*, we need a deeper understanding of the Ao community. For this matter, we need to know the Aos within linear historical perspective without which it will be difficult to render justice to the discussion of the *tarnunggr otsu*. For one reason among others, *tarnunggr otsu* bases its origin in the distant past of the Aos and as such basically respond to the distant past of the Aos.

Historical beginning and development of the Aos is given account by their oral tradition. Aos have no script of its own and hence no written account of the past is to be found. With blends of myth, superstition and historical incidents, the past history of the Aos had been handed down from generation to another through oral tradition till the last quarter of the twentieth century. It was only after the inception of western education that history of their distant past has been written down. These accounts are chiefly written by outsiders. The commentable names are J. P. Mills of the Indian Civil Service and Prof. J. H. Hutton, formerly of the Indian Civil Service and Honorary Director of Ethnography in Assam. Before these, there is a few insignificant accounts made by Dr. E. W. Clark relating to the inception and development of Christianity in Ao region. Though a lot of attempts are also made by Aos, only a few fragmented accounts of their distant past have been written down. However, all these accounts do not go beyond the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Thanks to oral tradition; the inaccessible terrain of the Ao history has been handed down from generation to another generation of the Aos. As such the Aos lean heavily on the oral tradition for different aspects.

The Aos refer to their oral 'text' for different modes of existence. But how can orality act as text? One can possibly question the legitimacy of oral accounts as historical documents in relation to rational truth. Questions as such cannot be answered duly except for the fact that the Aos attach a great deal of ethical value and legal sanction these accounts.

The history of the Aos is constructed with blends of myths, legends, tales and far-fetched historical incidents. One of the myths of the Aos, interconnected with tales and legends, gives account of their origin. According to the *Longterok* myth, the Aos believe to have emerged out of six stones lying in the outskirts of *Chongliyimti* village.⁹ The earliest trace of the Aos is attributed to this place. However, the Mongsen and Jungli phratries have different versions of this account.¹⁰

Chungliyimti village, now inhabited by the Sangtam Nagas, was originally a conglomeration of different 'khels' (groups) and phratries of the Nagas albeit without tribal names. According to different Naga legends, this place became limited as the population grew. The different phratries and groups left this place for other suitable settlements one after another. The last to leave was the Aos leaving behind the *Sangtams*. However, until then Aos did not have their distinct name as 'Ao'. According to another Naga myth, the instance of this group leaving the place culminated in the origin of the very name 'Ao'. In the Ao language 'ao' means 'go' or 'leave' and their articulation of the event with the word 'leave' or 'leaving' as 'ao' or 'aor' culminated in the origin of their name as well as their tribe.

⁹J.P. Mills in his book, *The Ao Nagas* (p. 6.) quotes from Dr. J.H. Hutton's *Tour Dairy* of his account of *Longterok*. I requote it here:

"November 6th.

"We went up to Chungliyimti, three miles off at the top of the hill, a small village of some thirty or forty houses, and paid a visit to Longterok, the famous six stones from which all Aos derive their origin. ... Only three of the six stones are standing, and the biggest (the 'female' stone, as it was pointed out to me) was knocked down by a Christian evangelist who destroyed a small phallus which stood in front of it... Two of the still standing stones were described to me as 'male' stones. The sixth was hard to find and we were told that one of them appeared and disappeared at its own caprice, ... but we eventually found it leaning up against a *ficus* of some sort. There was also a very small erect stone east of the path. All are in a patch of heavy jungle which may not be cut at all, and the stones may not be touched, as to do would cause storms of wind and rain or hail. The 'female' stone has a natural fissure in its surface with a deep hollow behind."

Many Aos, specially the older folks, still believes that they emerged out of the said six stones. It is ethical for them to hold on to the tradition their ancestral. Many Ao customary institutions attach legal sanction to these tales. One who transgresses or questions the validity of the oral accounts is imposed penalties and fines.

Still then, many question the rationale of the oral account of the *Longterok* myth. Leaving aside the ethical and legal sanction attached to the oral account of the origin of the Aos, research scholars have transgressed, not without penalties the 'frozen' framework of the oral accounts. According to Purtongzuk, five major Naga tribes namely, the Lothas, the Semas, the Ringmas, the Angamis and the Chakesangs came from the south east of the present Nagaland through Myanmar."¹¹ Panger Imchen opines that the *Mongsen* phratry came to Chungliyimti through the lower parts of Irrawadi valley whereas the *Jungli* phratry came through the upper part of the Chinwin at about 300 B.C. and their first settlement at Chungliyimti was in between 100 A.D and 125 A.D.¹¹

Whatever the ethicalities and the rationale attached to the *Longterok* account of the Aos, the *Longterok* account can be better employed on the symbolic level. It is my contention that the *Longterok* account pertains to the birth of their consciousness and the awareness of their settlement. Before this, they may have been primitive nomads of the Mongoloid race of the south East Asia. Here, along with the other groups and phratries, they must have learned how to settle, live, cultivate, and even communicate. Imti Aier in the similar line opines that the *Longterok* account of the Aos gives way to the attainment of "cultural and

¹⁰ Phratry is a division of the people in Ancient Greece for political or religious purposes; also one of the three subdivisions of a tribe in Athens. It also pertains to any tribal subdivision among primitive races. The Ao tribe is divided into two phratries – *Mongsen* and *Jungli*. See also Glossary

¹¹ Dr.Purtongzuk Longchar.2000. Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland. Print Hone, Dimapur, p.36

¹² Panger Imchen, Op. Cit. p.23.

social enlightment” and “innate sense of civic responsibilities” whereby they started considering themselves as a community of people.¹²

On another level of assumption, the origin of the Aos in Chongliymti can be founded on a linguistic basis. The languages of some of the Naga tribes seem to have originated and developed in Chongliymti. The languages of the Naga tribes, which trace their origin in Longterok or their first known settlement in Chongliymti, are similar. As for example, the word water is called ‘tzu’ in Ao language, ‘atzu’ in Sema language and ‘tzu’ in Sangtam language. The same goes with words as fire, rice, and other important word usages. The language of the Aos and Sangtams bear the most resemblances. This can be justified by the fact that the Aos and the Sangtams lived together for a longer period in Chongliymti as compared to the other tribes.

The Aos made the first separate settlement in Aonglenden, the present Ungma village, which was later called Soyim. According to an Ao legend, ten women gave birth to ten male babies. The villagers took it as a mark of blessing from the gods and thence called this place Soyim, meaning ‘village of birth’. There was further dispersal culminating in a number of villages. New settlements were made because of limitation of space necessitated by the practice of shifting cultivation and other practices and beliefs.

The primary economic activity of the ancestral Aos was *jhum* cultivation. The activity with the *jhum* field revolves all the year round. Even though the Aos have the kind of private land ownership, the village panchayat decides and chooses the land area for the whole village to carry out the cultivation every year. The cycle of *jhum* field varies from ten to fifteen years. In other words, after a patch is cultivated once it is cultivated next in ten to fifteen years depending on the

¹² I. Imti. Aier. 1969. *Ao Naga Social and Customary Genealogy*. Tl. Dalle Namo. Annanda Printing House. p. 1

availability of land of the village. This is done so in order to maintain soil fertility. There are many activities relating to the jhum cultivation as cutting forest, burning, sowing, harvesting, making footpath, etc.

Hunting, fishing and animal rearing were other economic activities. The Aos domesticate dogs since ancestral times. They also rear cattle, pigs and fowls for the purpose of meat, hide, and milk. Other activities included handicrafts, weaving and blacksmithy.

Mode of exchange was carried on barter system and *jabeli*. The Aos exchanged their products with each other through barter system. This system was also carried out with the neighboring Ahoms and the Assamese. The richer Aos practiced a kind of exchange through *jabeli*. However, this mode of exchange was carried only among the rich Aos because the *jabeli* was accounted as a valuable possession of the rich Aos only.

The Ancestral Aos had a distinctive polity since their stay in Chungliyimti. A unique kind of polity called *Potu Menden* was very well established. It is an institution of 'elder statesmen' belonging to the eldest age group representing all the clans existing in the village.¹³ Its main task is to lay down laws and regulations for social and political administration of the entire village. The members of the *Potu Menden* vacate their office, yielding place to a new body from time to time. The *chungli* phartry followed a standardized generation of thirty years.¹⁴

Under the organisational structure of the *Potu Menden* there are eleven age groups called *zunga*. The services of this *zunga* were very often requisitioned by the village in situations of emergency. One would find them in the forefront in all

¹³ Ibid. p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid. P. 4.

the village activities as well as in emergencies and dangers arising out of attack from other villages, fire, wild tigers and wild boars.¹⁵

An important educational institution of the ancestral Aos was the *arju*. As soon as Ao boys attain their puperty, they enter the *arju* under the name of *sungpur* age- group. With their entry, the senior age group then ascends in the heirarchy of the age group structure.¹⁶ The difrent age groups are assigned to perform different duties while they remain in the *arju*.

The ancestral Aos practised religion based on animistic belief. There is a hierarchy in the Ao pantheon of gods. *Lichaba*, the god of creation, is at the apex of all powers followed by *Meyutsung*, the god of judgement, *Longkitsungba* and *Nungjatsungba*. The ancestreial Aos also worshiped huge stones, trees and selected patches of land. They believed that the spirits of these existed.

There are many rituals and sacrifices connected to the Ao ancestral beliefs and practices. The chief among them are the *Mithun* sacrifice and the Buffalo sacrifice associated with different rituals. Associated with these are lots of beliefs and superstitions.

The difination of Aos is not complete without mentioning the practice of headhunting. This practice was not based on barbaric reasons or greed but for varlour and the pristige of the village. Other practices such as peace treaties and other legal aspects pertaining to inter-village disputes, boundary, and formation of new village were strictly followed.

The ancestral Aos celebrated two festivals - *Moatsu* and *Tsungremmong*. Both these festivals revolve around the agricultural cycle. *Moatsu*, the spring

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 6

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 15.

festival is celebrated in the first week of May. Before the festival, all necessary activities of the village such as construction and repair of houses, roads, marriage, and cleaning of the village water ponds are completed. This festival has more to do with merrymaking unlike other festivals, which have more rites and rituals. Dance folk songs, indigenous games and tribal chants lend color to the occasion. During the Moatsu Mong, very brisk competitions for the best rice-beer and the best reard animals like pigs, cows, fowls etc, were natural customary practices. The womenfolk try to make the best dresses for themselves and join the menfolk in dancing, eating and drinking wine, composing warrior's songs and singing in praise of their lovers and the village as a whole, encouraging the young warrior to be bold and heroic to defend and protect the village from enemies. The festival is also accompanied by traditional ways of exchange of gifts and friendship with other neighbouring villages.

During *Tsungremmong*, celebrated on the eve of harvest, young and old would wear their colourful costumes, sing songs and perform dances to express their gratitude to the supreme powers for helping their crops to grow well. They offer their best to the supreme power for abundant blessings during harvest.

Food habits of the Aos lend color to their ethnicity. The staple food of the Aos is rice. With it they eat meat and fish and vegetables. They have many local spices. These include fermented soyabean, wild pepper, fermented dry fish, fermented wet bamboo shoot and dry bamboo shoot. Ao cuisine includes many indigenous dishes.

The Aos have gone through many changes from their tribal structure. Within a period of a century and a quarter, the Ao life-styles have undergone drastic changes. It is important for us to trace the development of the Aos in

realation to change and continuity. The forces of change are created from within and outside.

One of the forces of change is their contact with the outside world with regard to other tribes and neighboring states. The Aos established friendly realtions with neitghbouring tribes in terms of peace and friendship treaties and different aspects of exchange. A good relationship with the neighbouring Ahoms was maintained in the form of trade. Trade was carried out chiefly in terms of barter system. Later, different forms of contact at the level of human relationships, economic activity and education were developed with different communities near and far.

The most important factor of change of the Aos is accounted to the inception of Christianity. An American baptist missionary, Dr. Clark, with the help of Godhula from Assam planted the seed of Christianity in Ao soil for the first time in the village of Molunkimong in 1872. Since then there has been a flux of change. Change occurred with the incorporation of western modes of life in terms of attitudes, manners and ways of life the.

The basis of introduction of formal education to Aos can be traced back to the later half of the twentieth century. It was the instance of the contact of Supongmeren of Molungkimong village with Dr. E. W. Clark an American Christian missionary stationed in Sibsagar (Assam) and Godhula, an Assamese Christian evangelist. Supongmeren learned English and Assamese from them and in turn taught Ao language to them. This also paved the way for their entry into the Ao land.

Consequently, with the efforts of Dr. Clark, English script was adopted for Ao language since Aos had no script of their own. Besides teaching Christian

songs and the Gospels in the newly constructed Christian chapel in Molungkimong village, Dr. Clark and Godhula taught the Aos to read and write in *arju* and in homes. Dr. Clark also came out with *Ao Naga-English Dictionary*. *The Ao-Naga Grammar* by his wife, Mary Mead Clark, followed this. This mode of education and westernization further dispersed to other villages. As a result, the first school in Ao land was established in Impur, which became the microcosm of modern education of the Aos.

There were other modes of modernization, which opened the floodgates of different cultures to flow into the Ao land. With all these, the Ao community was in a flux of change. This however raises a problem. Does this change the whole fabric of the Ao society? What is it that the Aos retain distinctness as ethnic group in the grip of all these changes? The Ao community bears a lot of traces of their past which are either continued or developed. How can things change as well as continue? Even though a large amount of displacement occurs hybridization takes place in a lot of instances.

This can be seen in the modern Ao polity and administration. *Potu Menden* still exists in every village as administrative local body co-existing with the village panchayat. Dobashi court, the customary Naga court of law, is attached to every administrative office, which deal with matters relating to the custom and culture of the Aos and the Nagas in general.

In the field of religion, even though 99.9 of the Aos are Christians, there is a lot of Ao traditional morals, ethics and norms practised in the Ao Christian belief system and practices.

In the field of education even though school, church and other institutions have replaced *arju*, the nodality of the *arju* institution is maintained. Mores,

attitudes, manners, ethics that were taught and practiced in the *Arju* are incorporated into the new institutional systems.

In all these, there is much displacement, distantiation and dispersal in relation to Ao culture.

Oral narratives can also be clubbed within the area of folklore. This encompasses fairy and other folktales, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, and regular ceremonies and rituals. On a broader plane, it can be defined as to include not only the traditional literature and rituals but also all material culture, social customs and artistic performances associated with a group of people. This broader plane follows the ideas of contemporary folklorists who reorganize that all groups of people maintain many different kinds of tradition, and define themselves through these traditional practices. Since time immemorial, the oral tradition seems to have existed for the Aos. Legal proceedings relating to cultural procedures and formalities in relation to marriage, funerals, inheritance, divorce, village polity, inter-village relationship and all of Ao customary courts are based on the oral tradition. This can be also approached from anthropological and sociological points of view. However, I will leave aside this consideration, as I will deal with folktales from the perspective of narrative.

What is a narrative? Narratives are, in the opinion of Roland Barthes, “able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written fixed or written images, gestures and the ordered mixture of all these substances” and he goes on to say that narrative is present in “myth, legend, fable, tale novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass- window, cinema, comics, news item, conversation”.¹⁷ Again, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is “present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with

¹⁷ Roland Barthes. 1993. “Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narratives” in Susan Sontag ed. *A Roland Barthes Reader*. London. p. 251.

the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative, all classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing cultural backgrounds”¹⁸

Faced with diverse forms and multiplicity of standpoints – historical, psychological, sociological, ethnological, aesthetic, etc. – from which they can be studied, narratives cannot be dealt on the grounds of universality.¹⁹ At best, they can be classified as types and explained in terms of difference and in opposition to each other.

Whatever be the problem we can at least classify Ao narratives. Within the genre of the Ao narratives there are legends, myths, folktales, folksongs and proverbial sayings.

Legends are prose narratives, which are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a remote period. Legends are more secular than sacred, and their principal characters are human. They tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chiefs and kings, and succession of ruling dynasties. In this way “they are often the counterpart of written history in verbal tradition.”²⁰ Ao legends are associated with historical accounts of villages, wars and account of important personalities of Ao ancestral history. Story of *Jina and Etiben* is a perfect example of it.

Myths are prose narratives, which in the society in which they are told, are considered truthful accounts of what happened in the past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 251.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 251.

²⁰ William R. Bascom. 1981. *Contributions to Folkloristics*, Meerut, India: Folklore Institute, Archana Publications. p.98.

to ignorance and doubt of disbelief. Ao myths consist chiefly of origins and creations.²¹

Folksong is a very important form of oral narrative in the sense that in many societies the unspoken and unspeakable ideas and messages are expressed through the folksongs. In the Ao society, they serve many purposes. It is used to express love, friendship, happiness, respect and other feelings and emotions. The tonality and rhythm are also important aspects of the folksong.

Folktales are all those prose narratives, which are simple entertaining, with or without moral, less systematic, less specialized, easy to understand and memorize with some scope of addition, subtraction and addition by almost all members of a folk-group. Folktales while dealing with situations familiar to listeners contain fictitious elements and have predominance of fanciful ideas of the folk.

It is interesting to see the distinguishing characteristics of in relation to other genres of narratives. First and foremost, it is opposed to other forms of narratives in the sense that it is to do with orality. Anything that is spoken, involving language and speech is oral. It is, however, not a simple personal act of speech. The oral activity includes two or more persons. The speaker and the listener/listeners. In the action, the speaker leans towards certain rules and conventions of language so that the articulation is legible to the listener.

Folktales have different modes of operation. The prominent ones are the oral form and the written form. Telling of folktales includes not only the texts but also the fanciful expression, gesture, acting, repetition and other recurrent patterns of the storytellers. Besides, the participatory listeners and the environment of the

²¹ Ibid. p. 98.

operation are also important. In the written form, the creativity and the open-ended nature of the tales give way to the multiplicity of readers' interpretations. We will be dealing with both these modes in this research.

Before venturing on to the discussion of *tarnunger otsu*, I would like to point to a problem. Why *tarnunger otsu* and not folktales? This can be best seen in relation to origin and development of the study of folktales, which will also give an insight into the different genres of folktales. Before folktales became the point of interest to scholars, the literary artists popularised the folktales. Gainbattista Basile's *Pentamerone* (1634- 1636), a collection of fifty Napolenic tales by, Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma Mere l'Oye* (1695-1698) and other oriental story publications such as *Panchatantra* and the *Arabian Nights*.²² The first attempt to study folktales traces its origin to the publication of the controvisial book *Einfache Foreman* by Andre Jolles which is a scrutiny of of oral narrative categories as simple spontaneous products originting in the spoken langusge, as opposed to complx, consiously created literary forms.²³ The first scholarly collection of folktales can be credited to Jacob and Wilhelmn Grimm to their publication of *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* in two volumes (1812- 1814). Wilhelmn Grimm's publication of stylized two hundred tales that followed was based on the assumption that folktales are the late relics of ancient mythology of the Indo-Germans, and that the myths of gods and heroes can be reconstructed from them.²⁴ There were other studies and publications based on different genres. The Marcheian tales, the Finnish tales, The American tales, the Indian tales as that of *Panchatantra* are noticable ones.

These genres have got their own ways of difining their respective tales. In this relation, *tarnunger otsu* can also be called a genre of folktales. The *tarnunger*

²² Linda Degh. 1972. "Folk Narrative" in Richard. M. Dorson Edited. *Folklore and Folklife*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. p. 54.

²³ Ibid. p. 54.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 55.

otsu are Ao tales relating to the distant past of the Ao history. The tales have been composed in the distant past of the Ao history. The composers are anonymous. New tales have not been added and cannot be added except for slight modifications and alterations in the act of telling and writing. As of the tradition of the *tarnunger otsu* as well as of the tradition of the AOs it has its own way of reading the *tarnunger otsu* which in a way restrict other modes of looking into it. This problem, with others, will be dealt with in the present research work.

How do we classify *tarnunger otsu*? It can be classified in terms of themes, motives and functions. However, all these categories may be found in a single tale. Again, a single tale may contain more than one theme or motive. There are historical, cultural, moral and ethical aspects in the tales but a watertight classification cannot be carried out in this manner. The best way to classify is in relation with the Ao cosmology. In the ancestral Ao cosmology the gods, humans and animals live together. This is clearly reflected in the *tarnunger otsu*. On this assumption, we can proceed to classify the *tarnunger otsu* in the following manner –

- a) Supernatural tales
- b) Human tales
- c) Animal tales

There are numerous theories as well as methods of analysis. Vladimir Propp's definition and model for structural study of folktales was limited within variants and constants in terms of dramatis personae and functions. This approach can be seen as reductionist. By following this model, the essence and significance of different genres may be lost.

Apart from the fact that translation of theories of being is problematic, it is difficult to render other discourses rational through it. On the other hand, folklore



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embodies a theory of being with its own criteria of plausibility.²⁵ The ontology underlying folktale is not an obscure fantasy of simple primitive superstitions but is fundamental in determining what is deemed convincing in the construction of a narrative. The academic can only approach alternative rationalities by considering their apparent motivation. Folktales have their own ‘political’ agendas, which frequently embody local resistance against a centralizing authority. Folktales need not necessarily be analysed or revived through external forces as theory, for they are living forces in themselves.

With these issues in mind, various theories and approaches will be translated and contextualised for this research. Besides, the pattern of reading inherent in *tarnunger otsu* will also serve as one of the main approaches.

Another relevant aspect is the problem of *tarnunger otsu* and responses to it. For one thing, this is the way the Aos tell of their existence. It responds to the past history of the Ao culture, tradition and beliefs. It also responds to the individuals, community, identity and different forces of change. Do they respond to the individual Ao or to the Ao community or other communities at large? Or All of it? What is the function of these responses? Furthermore, the way in which the Ao individuals and the Ao community and other individuals of other communities respond to the tales will be explored. The responses will be examined within historical time frame and geographical space.

It is interesting to see the way *tarnunger otsu* relates to the unwritten past of the Aos. It is interesting to see the way the *tarnunger otsu* relates to an unwritten past of the Aos. Here the narrative seems to be engaged not primarily with historical facts but basically with culture. Culture in this context encompasses a broad area as of the ways of life, attitudes, mode of thinking and

²⁵ Robert Layton. 1999. “Folklore and Worldview” in Amy Gazin-schwartz and Cornelius J. Holtorf ed.

understanding. Beliefs and customs also form a part of it. But culture as we know is not static. It doesn't remain at the stage of the tribal level. With the constant flux of change, culture undergoes tremendous, if not, significant changes and transformation. Here, things get renewed or changed. This seems to displace the significance of the *tarnunger otsu*.

Here my basic question will be the place folktales in a modern culture that respond to a bygone tribal culture. This is the basic problematic of *tarnunger otsu* and cultural change. This can be partially answered through the nature of the universality and timelessness of the *tarnunger otsu*. There are elements in the *Tarnunger otsu* that live beyond and across geographical boundaries and time limits.

Another problem pertains to what happens to *Tarnunger otsu* when the cultural fabric of the community in question changes. It will be better understood by studying the nature as also the forces and aspects of the cultural change. The forces seem to be gathered from within the community and from outside. In other words, the change takes place through both internal and external forces. Internal forces will relate to the change in mode of behavior, way of life, attitude, thinking and understanding. The latter will relate to the outside forces as well as of other cultures. Both these forces work together in the evolution of 'another' culture. In this process, hybridization takes place with the best elements of both the forces.

A culture does not undergo a complete change and transformation. It gathers the remnants of the past culture and fuses with the better of the one that is current. In the process, the best of the bygone culture is ascertained. The traces of the best part of that culture is not only retained but also appropriated. How can one decide what is best. In this process where the 'best' is upheld, *tarnunger otsu*

comes into play. *Tarnunger otsu* play a significant part for it is the 'text' of timeless wisdom and understanding. It provides the best ingredients of that culture at the same time resist whatever is not desirable. Who decides the best ingredients in *tarnunger otsu*?

Tarnunger otsu is the rich strata of Ao society. It not only reflects the percepts of the society but also directs the actions of the society. They are hence frozen in timelessness. Academicians may question the nature of the timelessness of the folktales: does it entail that they do not grow vis-a-vis the changing dynamic society? In this context, how do folktales signify? *Tarnunger otsu* are not necessarily historical facts and figures but are refined thoughts and truths of the Ao community. This pertains to the unchangeable aspects of the tales. Now 'timelessness' does not necessarily entail an idea of frozen time but brings home the idea of time that can never die out: that of eternity. One of the natures of *tarnunger otsu* is of universality and timelessness. *Tarnunger otsu* is ageless. They are old and venerable, but they are also new and up to date; they are consistent and yet continually reinterpret ideas.²⁶ They are universal truths, which cannot wear out with passage of time and hence find space in any passing generation.

²⁶ Linda Degh. 1972. "Folk Narrative" in Richard M. Dorson edited, *Folklore & Folklife* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. p. 53.

Chapter 2

TRANSLATION OF *TARNUNGER OTSU*

The *tarnunger otsu* has been transmitted orally for centuries from one generation to another generation of Aos since pre-historic times. *Tarnunger otsu*, as folktales, is best seen in the act of narration. This takes into account both the narrator and the listener. The *tarnunger otsu* has been transcribed from the act of narration and translated from the Ao to the English language. The *tarnunger otsu*, in these processes of transcription and presentation, tend to be twice removed from its essence. It is removed in the first place when it is written down because this mode of articulation fails to contain the narrator's act and the listeners' response. The "dramatic play of the raconteur in the performance, his voice and gestures, the reactions of the spectators ... are as much a part of the tale as the wording".¹ Their gestures and expressions that add greater meaning and relevance to the tales fail to find room in the written form of folktales. Besides, "in order to get an authentic tale in full, one has to catch it in its natural environment".² The social environment of the narrator and listener that adds meaning and significance to the tales find no space in the written form of the tales.

The Ao words, are culture laden. It is said that like those of any other language the "Ao Naga lore, names of persons, clans and even places are an integral aspect of the oral tradition, which embody everything related to the traditional Ao way of life. Names are, therefore, in their own right, mini treasure-houses of legends, myth, clan histories, and commentators of personal achievements of

¹ Heda Jason & Dimitri Segal. 1977. *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton. The Hague. p. 237.

² Ibid., p. 237.

individuals in particular and of clans in general”.³ Can translation do justice to these culturally coded words? For example, when an Ao *jungli* word, ‘*sungkong*’ is translated as ‘log drum’, the English expression fail to convey the cultural and traditional connotation of the Ao word. Translation of the *tarnunger otsu* from Ao language to English language fail to fully transport the meaning of the Ao words and consequently of the tales. This is the second instance of distancing of the *tarnunger otsu* from reality.

Besides the loss of cultural significance of the tales through translation, it renders loss in another instance. When the translated English word is used frequently it tends to substitute the Ao word counterpart for good. There are various instances of this aspect with the Ao dialect. To name a few translated words that are frequently employed are, Morung (English) for *Arju* (Ao), Mithun Sacrifice (English) for *Suji* (Ao) and Log drum (English) for *Sungkong* (Ao). For these reasons, utmost care has been taken in this research work to preserve the culturally coded Ao words. To this end some coded Ao words are written in italics without being translated. These words have been explained in the glossary at the end this work.

Many Ao words don’t find the right English word substitute. In such instances, the nearest English equivalent has been used.

The structure of Ao language being different from that of English, it is not possible to follow a strict mode of translation based on English. The best possible structure syntax is maintained, relating to words, phrases, and sentences. This aspect will be dealt in the concluding part of this chapter.

³ Birendranath Datta. 2002. *Affinities between Folkloristics and Historiography: Some Theoretical Implications in the Context of Medieval and Modern history of North – East India*. National Folklore Support Centre. Chennai. P. 87.

It would be helpful for this research work to have a few words on the nature of Ao script. The Aos use the Roman script with one additional alphabet, 'Ü'. The sound of the alphabets is similar with that of English with slight alterations. For example, 'a' has the sound of 'a' in father; 'e' as in 'eat'; 'b' as in English; 'd' as in English and so forth.⁴ Another important aspect of the Ao is there are lots of similarly articulated, but with different tones having different meanings. Eg., the word 'ao' in Ao dialect has a lot different meanings. To cite a few examples, 'Ao' – the 'Ao' tribe; 'ao' – 'go'; 'ao' – 'bamboo', and 'ao' – 'yes'. The meanings are differentiated through different pitch in utterance of the word. Pitch, here, does not simply mean high and low tone of voice. It is closely related to the pitch of musical tone, which can be best represented with the help of musical note. This cannot be explained in this research work due to limitations of time and space.

In the translation that follows, various *tarnunger otsu* in Ao *Mongsen* dialect are translated into English language. They are selected from a text titled *Aor Tarnunger Otsu* by N. Talitemjen Jamir (ACYE Press, Mokokchung, 1988). The tales considered for translation is done on the basis of classification of the *tarnunger otsu* discussed in the introductory chapter. One tale from every classification is translated.

⁴ Clark, Mary. M. 2002. *The Ao Naga Dictionary*. Mittal. New Delhi. p. 3

Tale one

Yi Mozu

Mapang ka nung kibong ka nung jabaso ka yutsur tetsu sua adok. Mapang tatsuka lir kulen tebui rapitsur ka akinua akum. Rapitsurlai asangubadakji knaga meketmesemi akum. Anungji achiajemba ajak nung onsara bendangpenria aru. Saka lar jabasojibo chiyungtsu tajung ajak chidaktsu. Yamaji rapir jabasobo mapa ajak inyakdaktsu saka lar jabasob mapa temela dang inyakdaja aru. Alui aoshia rapirjabaso nem chitsung tashi temer yok, anungji chisung tashi asunung pai sungdong ka nung chi tshiji temer arakloka sa yutsu. Alui aoshia yaseta arudang chitemji salara chi tashi ngua ain adoa jashiseta sungdongnungjisa arakloka yutsu. Achi oda anungdang kodanga (teti) chi mechiongisa mapa inyak.

Saka anogo eshika lir sungdong anasaji aodang pai teronum tajung ka menemshi nung anasai oa menemdang. Iba tetemji pai salar chidang nung knga junga citet. Alui ao shia pai achi chia chia pa sentsu ajak melena merema akum. Aso tajung kuma ao tashi nung rapitsurlaji kanga sungmang, kechiyong chi tashi dang temer yoker nung ku chir chi tajung chiyungsangbo temang majung saka pabo chiyungtsu tamajung chiaka ya koda asu ta sumgmang.

Maremteti, lai asundng, “na kechisa achir”? Idangji pai ashi “nai chi tashi temtsubato ni sungdong ka nung sa arakloka ayur, aser aji kodang teronem menemdir aji sa achir”. Tamoi ashi “nabo iba sungdongji bener adokang”, anungji pai kongsang ka bener adoka akatsu. Tamoi iba sungkup aser tuji meyoksar chi den meyoktepa ayu. Anogo eshika lir teronem tajung menema akum nung aji salar cjhidang. Tachitsu asoshi kanga tajung liasu. Iba anogo nungjagi iba sungdong dangji Yinungrangdong aja aser yi ynagludnag iba sungkup aser tu amshia aru.

Translation of Tale one
Fermenting Plant of Wine

Once in a family the mother died leaving behind a son. Time lapsed and the father wanted to marry a wife and did so. The stepmother developed a dislike towards the young boy. She discriminated between her own son and the young boy by being partial. Her own son was given the best possible food. The young boy was given all the tough chores while her son was given easy ones. Whenever the young boy went to the field he was given rotten rice for mid-day meal and the young boy used to tie the sachet of rotten rice on a tree. Every time he felt hungry in the field, he would open the sachet of the rotten rice and in his anger would again tie it on the tree. Thus he worked in the field without mid-day meal.

But after some days he got a good aroma near the tree, so he went near a sachet and smelt it. The sachet smelt so good that he opened and tasted it. Every time he went to the field he had it and his complexion became fairer. As he developed a handsome body the stepmother wondered as to why her son who was always given good food did not develop a handsome body as compared to that of the young boy who was given rotten rice.

She couldn't bear it and asked him, "what do you eat?" The young boy replied " I tie the rotten rice to a tree and I eat it when it smells tasty". The stepmother said, "bring that tree". So he brought a branch of the tree and gave her. The stepmother grinded the bark and leaves of the branch, mixed it with rice and stored it. After some days it smelt good and so she opened and tasted it. It was very tasty to eat.

From that day on, the tree was called 'Yinungradong' and since then its bark and leaf are used in the process of brewing wine.

Tale two

Mesu Tongpang Jakrep.

Mapang ka nung Lichabai shiruru ajak par kimai yari jaok. Mesula tebur kima yardaki aotsu atema sobutsu bushi ao, idnagji pa medemer Shirongi Susang indang tongpang aoyar agutsu. Mesuji kanga pelaaseta tongpnagji meyushir longma nung pua yur kodangang yardak jagi aotsu yongya-a kazu. Saka susangbo pa meyong tongpangji kong lir ta repranga senzudang pa tongpangji longmanung pua ngur tejashi nung sunglak ka tsutadtsua tongpangji jakreptsu.

Mesu joko yari aotsu mapang atongji pa tongpangji tajidangi aodanag jakreper liasu. Aji ngua onsara jashiba agi joktena pongzudang Tsula ka mejanga aliba teyongi ajem dangtsu. Tsulaji tasumarem ateptena aodang Omenji entsu moka aliba jakreptsu. Omenjia tejashi marem ali sosaa alidang Lijaba-i kechiba ozu li sosatsur ta merenshi. Omenji-i ashi, “obo ni entsu moka alidang Tsula arua ku entsu jakreptsu”. Anungji Tsula pua arua asung dang nung. Pai ashi, “obu ni anu wanga ejanga alidang Mesui ana kuma ajem dangtsu nung tasu maem ateptendang entsuji mungui jakreptsu”. Mesu pua asung dang nung, “nia ner kima yardaki arutsu asoshi tongpang shidoka pua ayunung Susangi sunglak tsutakja jakreptsu”. Susangji-a pua assung dang nung nur kima yardaki arutsu tongpang bushinung aji meyr lungma pua ngur tejashi agi sunglak ka tsukdakja jakreptsu ta ashi. Tatem nung Lijaba-i mesudang asung dang, “na tongpangji kong nungi angu?”. “Obu ni tongpang ka kanga nungdaka bushia alidang ku medemer Shirongi bener arua agatsu”. Lichabaji Shirongji pua na kechiba tangar tongpang aouya ta artsu aser making ka nung sepa yur tsumolu agai alettsu atema tabeni ao. Lijaba meyipa marudang shirong making telong nungi tashi agi ayimten, “o shi anggo chinutbo yagi sentepangni”. Iba olaji angashia Shitsuk ka jua arua makang anasaji nokdak. Aji ngua Shirongi asung dang, “Temba naia kechisa techinuba?”. Shitsuki langzu, “Temba nibo anshiang techinuba”. Idangji Shirongi ashi, “ni agatsutsuar nabo tamasa ya lapokang”. Aji lapoktsunung Shirongi ashi, “temba ni anshi pushi-i odir idaki na ia ataa liang”, ta sur shibanga yutsur pelaseta jera ao. Tatsukalir Lijabai

tsumolu bener arua making dakji shiloktsu nung Shitsukji ola adoka "obo ni yangi lir" ta talet marem asa. Aoksar reprangdang nung par semchir ang leter angu. Idangji Lichaba-I ashi, "tanua Shirong melen semchir Shitsuk ang alet no" ta makangji lapoka shitsukji chiok.

Translation of Tale two

Hind breaks Earring.

Once upon a time *Lichaba* invited all the animals to dance in his courtyard. Hind went out in search of costumes to go to the dance at the courtyard of her grandpa. Thence, her friend, Fox, gave her a *tongpang* having stolen from a Squirrel. Hind very happily brushed and placed the *tongpang* over a stone to dry and waited impatiently looking forward to going to the dance at her grandpa's courtyard. But Squirrel was searching for her *tongpang* all over the ground below and spotted it being dried over a stone. In her anger at the sight, she swung a twig at the *tongpang* and broke it.

When time approached to go for the dance, Hind went to get the *tongpang* and found it broken. In her angry act of hopping and jumping, she accidentally trampled down the sleeping Earthworm into two pieces. Earthworm, with unbearable pain of death shagged all over and broke Bird's egg. Bird in its agony was scattering the ground when *Lichaba* threatened and asked her why she was scattering his land. The bird replied, "grandpa, Earthworm came and broke my egg when I was hatching it". So, when *Lichaba* picked up Earthworm and asked why, the latter replied, "grandpa while I was taking a nap in the sun, Hind trampled me down into two pieces and as I was shagging all over with severe pain of death I broke the egg unintentionally". On asking Hind, she replied, "in order to come to your courtyard to dance I had washed and placed my *tongpang* over a stone to dry whereupon Squirrel threw a twig and broke it". When asked, the squirrel replied that while she was searching around for her *tongpang* to go to the dance, she saw it being brushed and dried over a stone and in her anger threw a twig and broke it. At

last *Lichaba* asked Hind, “from where did you get the *tongpang*?”. “Grandpa, when I was searching a *tongpang* in dire need for the dance in your courtyard, Fox brought the *tongpang* and gave it to me”, replied Hind. *Lichaba* caught Fox and scolded for stealing other’s *tongpang* and shut him up in a hollow basket. Then he went off to fetch water to splash it over Fox.

Before *Lichaba* returned, Fox howled from the hollow basket thus, “O! Ye all wanting to eat meat and fish be assembled here”. Hearing this voice, Jackal crawled over and stood near the hollow basket. Seeing this, Fox asked, “friend, what all do you want to eat?” Jackal replied, “friend, I like chicken best”. Then, Fox replied, “I’ll give it to you, but first open this hollow basket”. When opened, Fox told jackal, “friend I’ll go to get chicken, so you get into this and wait”, and shut the Jackal up in the hollow basket and fled away happily.

Shortly, *Lichaba* returned with the hot boiled water and splashed it over the hollow basket. Jackal cried out in pain, “grandpa its me” and *Lichaba* was dismayed to find his grandson burnt with the hot water. Then, *Lichaba* let out Jackal saying, “again, instead of Fox, my grandson has been burnt”.

Tale three

Tsungken Pungmang

Konung tsungken ka par longki nung anisungzuka mejang dang pungmang tamajung ka pungmanger sak aser kanga shisa bulua ya kechi ataloktsu ta tsubuseta tatenten nung iba ken ya aten.

“*Yasa yamang mapongpo
Yafu emshia ngunoni
Kunaro keni nemli
Nibo pongdang yimli
Nina patsu matsumir
Tsuti yimka ludini*”⁵

⁵This song is in the *Mongsen dialect*. See Glossary for *Mongsen dialect*.

(Yasung pungmang ta majung ka pungmangogo, nisung ka arua tsu sepli ni pua aruaki pongdang nung enokli ta pungmang. Ni aji mereprangnurji ayunglang pushia ludi)

Iba kenji tener, tanua majungtsu alitsuvar ta bilemer ayonglangleni aludang longki shia dang “nia aitdakjangni, nia aitdakjangni” ta asungdanga alu. Saka longki katia memela. Aniseta longki ajak dang mepishia senzur kelen tesusa longki kati “na koda mesura aitungma” ta ashi nung tepela agi nuktsi alua longki jaki ia anen. Saka pungmang jisa bilemteta temulung mesungzuki tenuk ajak merekshia tsubuseta ata.

Panuji nisung ka ausu ka bener iba ayung jaki ayungsepi⁶ aru aser iba moti ji sepmeso. Tsu moshia longki-i aitdangji kanga tsubuseta ata aser tsu ajak septoker anggo pua pongdangn nung enokli ta asubaji ngua tsubuseta liasu. Tesusa la aliba lungji mekuptok aser la pua aru. Idangji lai lungdangji ashi, “nibo nudak temulung lema jenok nung ano pudaktsurno” ta ashi nng, “aya! Nabo yutsur nibo kodanga mesaktetsusa laodaktsuokoni” ta langzu. Aji oda longki jagi lendong mapang nung mekumzukba agi tsungeni longki nung entsu makor aser techanua longki nung meyutsui lai dang bener senzur ta jembir.

Translation of Tale two

Crab's Dream

One night, a crab had a bad dream while sleeping in its cave. In her worry and fear as to the omen of impending danger she sang thus:

⁶ From *Ayung-asep of jungli* Ao word. It is a popular kind of fishing of Aos carried out in streams. The fisherman chooses a strategic spot in the stream and builds dam over the river or makes outlet for flowing water over the selected spot and splashes the water out of the selected spot and overturns stones and catches fish, crab and lobster.

Last night I had a nightmare
A man came splashing water
And fished me out
And put me in a hollow container.
Let me go downstream
Since I don't want to have this dream come true.

Having sung thus, she thought that the day would be bad for her. While proceeding downstream she asked every cave, "may I be let in, may I be let in?" Later, after getting tired requesting every cave, one responded, "you may come in if desperate". With tears of joy rolling down, the crab got in and lodged in the cave. But the thought of the dream would not leave her and she kept watching with her eyes wide-open.

That day a man came fishing with a wooden platter and started throwing our water from the spot where she was lodged. The crab waited terror-struck as the water got into the cave. When all the water in the spot was thrown out from that spot, the man started catching the fishes. She waited with terror seeing the man putting the fishes in the hollow container. Finally, the man overturned the stone where she was lodged. Then, she told the stone, "I lodged here with trust in you, but you cannot help me from being caught?" The stone replied, "Ah! The trouble is not just yours, I have been made to fall down in a manner that I will never to be able to stand up".

Since the stone couldn't save the crab in that time of danger, a saying goes on that the crab never lay eggs or keep its young ones in caves of stone; rather, she carries them around with her.

Translation is a complex exercise. Apart from its problem relating to cultural aspect of words, which I have discussed in the beginning of the chapter, there are other important problems as well. They relate to the structure of language.

Chapter 3

SEMIOTICS AND INTERPRETATION OF *TARNUNGER OTSU*

The *tarnunger otsu* can be seen as semiotic universe through attribution of ideas to forms. The sign is dependent upon a signifier and a signified to mark its significance. The signification is again dependent upon the environment. With all these in mind we are up to displace the semiotic approach initiated by Ferdinand De Saussure which was later developed by French semiotic structuralists. Their basis being linguistic, signification is limited to the structural content of the tales. This line was fully developed by Vladimir Propp in his analysis of Russian tales which was limited to the structural contents of functions and dramatis personae in relation to constants and variants.

Our semiotic analysis will try to situate the tales in the cultural context of the Ao community. The analysis derives a depth of insight by addressing the human discourse through the dialectics of a cultural system. The analysis arrives at a holistic picture of the Ao cosmology of the Ao community.

Signification: The prevailing environment also plays a vital role in the signification of the tales. Here, the community's varied experiences become the directing force of signification. By modifying the structural semiotic approaches, we have also the narrator and the listener as the necessary components of signification. The gestures of the narrator and the modifications in the tale in the process of narration are intrinsic to signification. Also the response of the listener in terms of gestures and body language go together in a constant act of communication with the narrator in the process of signification of the tales.

The cosmology of the Ao community can also be seen in the social structures and also their beliefs and values. The nature of the tales themselves supports the functional role of mytifying the conceptual.

The Ao belief system can be said to be concerned with the expressions of values of the Ao community, which safeguards them by endowing them with divine sanction. The Aos acknowledge the supernatural beings as the power that control life.

Ao word sign: For this matter some untranslated Ao words are employed in order to give a fuller rendering of signification. The words in Ao language pertain to key word signs whose meaning and signification has been crystallized as cultural codes through the practice and tradition of Aos over a long period of time. These words or, rather, concepts are not individual constructs but social imprints that resist modification and translation.

On the level of tales, *tarnunger otsu* can also be seen as signs of the Ao community. They can be seen as conceptual systems. Like ritual and beliefs, folktales perpetrate the cultural identity, its values and ideas of a community. At the obvious level, folktales are endorsed by the society that created them. At a deeper level, they trace the various discourses that shape and condition the community at their existential plane. The natures of folktales reveal the high intellectual activity that marks its creation. The tales ignore the parameter of reality and in fluid movement in space and time; the situation and characters are imaginatively constructed. Images created in abstraction transcend the tangible world. Fantastic and surrealistic images of supernatural, the animate and the inanimate beings are found in the tales. These beings interact with each other at a uniform level, speaking and conjugating the agility of the human mind.

Folktales acquire the status of myths having traveled through space and time progressively evolving into highly crystallized ideas. The simple narratives of folk tales are in fact the very considered forms of abstraction. The presence of images in the matrix of the narrative of which are 'frozen' adds to the timeless quality of the tales. The images are frozen and they lie dormant, as their ideological references become absolute.

A conceptual system is evolved, in a context out of complex relationships and activities with the general environment. The perceived motions that constitute the system are acquired in part through their participation in a culture, in part through a lifetime of trying to deal effectively with experience, and doubtless in part through patterns that have become wired into the human nervous system.

The epistemology of conceptual discourses of the AOs is based on an understanding of the spatio-temporal dimension in its cyclic movements. The rhythm of nature and the soil makes its history. Man participates in the making of time along with the earth cycle through agricultural activities. The concept of cyclic time is evolved. It effect and conditions his relationship with nature and the society. One such concept is the idea of renewal and regeneration. The sense of recurrence in such a concept makes him understand the dynamic communion of life and nature. The fragmentary view of existence is rejected for a hostile and accommodating oneness.

The perceived patterns or schemes become the basis on which the society sets its codes, which in turn directs the dynamism of culture. The codes themselves justify their imposition the belief system rationalize the concept of an unpredictable and in comprehensible universe.

We can attempt at understanding the Ao cosmology through a study of their social structure and also their beliefs and values. The folk tales express statements of

value or reason for why things are the way they are. The nature of the tales themselves supports the functional role of mystifying the conceptual.

Ao Cosmology: The belief system can be said to be concerned with the expressions of values of a society, which safeguards them by endowing them with divine sanction. The *Aos* acknowledge supernatural beings as the power that control nature and life. For the *Aos*, there is a High-god *Lichaba* at the apex of all power.¹ He is the creator of the universe, a benevolent figure who sustains nature and all its inhabitants. He manifests himself through nature. The system, beauty power and all aspects of nature are attributed to this God. The worship of the objects of nature is therefore not worship in them but of high God.

Natural and the supernatural unite in the objects and elements of creation this holding the cosmos in a sacred community. The normal system extends to the whole of creation. All creations sustained by the earth are held in a bond of brotherhood. In many of the *Ao tarnunger otsu*, we find animals, humans and god living together.

The Ao view through an exploration of its cosmology and its social systems. The Ao conceptual universe has evolved out of the community's experience in the physical world. The conceptual systems in turn can be seen to direct the dynamism of the Ao culture through the creation of socially sanctioned practices.

For the *aos* there is a hierarchal order of gods with *Lichaba* at the apex of all the supernatural powers. He is the creator of the universe and a benevolent figure. The mystery, beauty power and all aspects of nature are attributed to this god. Natural and supernatural unite in the existential sphere in a sacred communion in the Ao belief.

¹ Mills, J. P., *The Ao Nagas*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1973. p.220.

The attitude of reference and accountability to the gods and responsibility to the creatures and beings of the earth brings out the dialectics of moral and ethical system that circumscribes the Ao culture. The moral and ethical system extends to the whole of creation. All the creatures and beings are sustained by the universe are held in a brotherhood.

There is a good place for fertility in *tarnunger otsu*. Fertility is understood in term of productivity plenty and the life giving. In other words, it is a quality that can be transformed into materials culture. The possessing of this quality attributes high status to the undivided. The individual who has it is able to spread it around his family and his village. Fertility as an umbrella concept over the Ao's whole existence, through activities like agriculture, material prowess, fasting and death specially related to this idea are the gods and spirits, who do not affect the people directly but have power to affect the cyclical flow of fertility.

Feast of Merit: An individual with surplus grain could invite the whole village for a feast signifying his act of merit and generosity. Such feasts make the host eligible to wear certain socially codified clothing or ornament depicting its higher status in the society.

The conceptual systems of Aos hold their universe together. The concepts developed through contact with the divine action to mythify the objects of culture. The cosmology of the Aos and the entire ethical and values system evolving out of it, defines and directs his relation with the environment. Folk tales and rituals embody the ideas that sustain as well as generate transformation of their world. Socially sanctioned practices, like feast of merit, head hunting, sexual prowess with others promote and preserve culture and in turn objectify and enforce the concept that uphold the Ao cosmology towards a distinctive culture.

The Ao universe: In the Ao Ancestral belief, the humans, god, animals and plants lived together. It is no wonder that the Ao cosmology partakes animate and inanimate forms – spirits, humans, animals and physical objects as stones, trees and mountains. All these forms are intrinsically knitted into one ecosystem. It is this relationship in constant interaction that the *tarnunger otsu* is seen. However, the *tarnunger otsu* can be classified into the following categories -

- a) The animal universe
- b) The spiritual universe
- c) The human universe.

When these worlds intersect a variety of situations evolve which offer insights into the continuous struggles of the community to come to terms with their existence. The stories attempt to understand their situation to address and ultimately assign a place to their desire and fears. All these tales together go to represent the Ao cosmology.

The Human Universe: The individual not only conditions situation but by set patterns of human relations. The human universe is considered on this basis that he has to deal with the parameters of sociological codes. The depth of struggle and desire is brought out in the human stories. The themes explored are based on the intricacies of human relationship like love, rejection acceptance, mistrust, suspicious, circumscribed by an overall social context. The theme of death is conspicuously echoed in the human universe, death as opposed to life. Death is not just the physical experience but also the social death of rejection, isolation and elimination. It serves as a desire in the tales to usher in new world or effecting change.

The human-universe narratives are prominent by their reference to the inward depth of the existential situation of man, and the response to the ethical and moral questions particular to men.

The Animal Universe: The animal universe address wide ranging issues of the human condition according to the themes. In the story of the *Four water Creatures* moral of selfless sacrifice is depicted.

The Supernatural universe: The spirit universe is conceptual. Spirits are understood only through their effects in the physical world.

Tarnunger otsu is laden with meanings. They have to be probed by going beyond the structural content of the tales. In this case, we cannot obtain, from the qualities of the semantic fields found in the wording of the tales, direct information of the respective culture.²

The meanings embedded in the tales can be surfaced by understanding the Ao ancestors and of the contemporary Ao community. The tales call for a deeper analysis for understanding its meanings. The meanings of the tales can be seen through interpretation.

Interpretation can be carried out in numerous ways through varied methods. There are theories and approaches that deal with folktales. Whatever be the rationale of the academic approaches, the *tarnunger otsu* has its own criteria of plausibility and its way of reading and interpretation.

Interpretation of *tarnunger otsu* can be carried out in varied levels. A couple of instances are the physical and the symbolic. In the former, signification is obvious. Here, *tarnunger otsu* can be seen as a reflection of the ancestral times of the Aos. The tales, most appropriately reflects the modes of life, attitudes, norms and belief systems of the Ancestral Aos. These features are seen quite explicitly. In the other level, the signification of the tales is implicit. In the second

²Jason, Heda & Segal, Dimitri. 1997. *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton, The Hague. p.280.

level of interpretation, tales are seen as obscure. The symbolic level of interpretation sees the tales as metaphor laden with meanings. The signification is implicit. The meanings lie deep. One is called to see *tarnunger otsu* in relation to the rapid change of the Ao community in the grip of different modernizing forces. We are called forth to see the tales in the flux of change.

Again interpretation can be carried out in terms of diachronic and synchronic time frames. This will take into account of the folktales on syntagmatic and paradigmatic orders. Folktales can be seen in the whole history of the Ao community. It is a whole historicity of representation. On the level of paradigm, we can see the tales in relation to certain point of time at certain location. In another instance, it can be also seen in terms of personal instances. The way it reflects the personal aspiration and even individual's plight in the grip of the dominant cultural pattern of its own community.

On all these levels of interpretations, justice in cannot be rendered to *tarnunger otsu*. In other words, the 'message' content in the tales cannot be interpreted truly. Here we have to look into the kind of interpretation desired by the *ternunger otsu*. The best convenient basis of interpretation can be carried out in the levels of society, history, tradition, culture, custom, religious beliefs, attitudes, habits, manners, ethics, moral and ethical values. With these in mind, we will employ other levels of interpretation that does the best to surface to inherent meaning of the tales.

This will be studied with definite headings. The different levels and aspects of interpretation are selected on random order, which I feel important for this paper. There can be more levels and aspects of interpretation, which cannot be done justice to in this paper.

History: Folktales provide continuity of history. It not only links the past with that of the present, but brings into life the unwritten past. Folktales reside in the margins of belief and unbelief. The basis of belief is established not on the rationale of scientific truth, but on the grounds of ethicality and legality. Of ethical level, the layperson or semi-educated people believes the accounts. They accept and respect their oral accounts and try their best at retaining them. On the legal level, the communities upholding the tales make it mandatory for its members to accept the tales in their face value. In other words, the members are restricted from questioning the scientific validity of the tales.

The 'Historical-reconstructural' approach employ folklore and folk life materials to recapture vanished historical periods for which other evidence is scanty. This theory is however challenged and questioned by various academicians and of a problem - the degree of trust that can be placed in the historical and ethnological content of narrative traditions. Even so, the tales in the form of 'historical monographs' demonstrate the possibilities of utilizing traditional recollections to reconstruct the past. By studying the movements of folktales across community and culture zones by the 'historical – geographical method' of folkloristics, much information about culture contact and culture change can certainly be obtained.”³

There is a serious question on the issue of the reliability about the historical accuracy of traditional accounts. Folktale cannot be accepted on face value as portraying factual truth the past. But neither can it be rejected as false. It can allow as preserving he memory of certain events or practices over very long time

³ Birendranath Datta. 2002. *Affinities between Folkloristics and Historiography: some Theoretical Implications in the Context of Medieval and Modern history of North – East India*, National Folklore support Center. Chennai. p. 87.

periods. The junctures between folktale and history and between folktale and prehistory are located in the experience of people.

Since folktales come with a blend of many fictitious elements albeit it's historical content, direct historical contents will be hard to come by in them. But history and folktales are necessarily joined and that, historical events can not be fully understood without understanding the attitudes and actions of real men and women that are found in folktale, and that folktale cannot be fully understood without understanding the historical circumstances of its creation and transmission.

What could be the basis of interpretation to give out accuracy to the tales' account? Origin myths are told in mythological language, which is symbolic interpretive. They reveal not so much facts about the past as the significance of the past. It is thus more appropriate to look to the stories for meaning than for facts. It is this meaningfulness, not its historical accuracy. And, when meaning as the most significant aspect of folklore, the question of its authenticity becomes moot: if it has become part, it is part of that traditions whether or not its origins are in literature or commercial invention, these meaningful stories may contain accurate information about old practices.

Can the *tarnunger otsu* be seen as historical account of the Aos? The *chongilyinti* account gives a description of the *Ao* starting point of history: a mythical account of origin.⁴ Aos in the absence of written history, and for that matter, absence of script refers to their own folkloristic text.

Much of what is known to the Aos today goes back to recorded materials that span about 130 years. The inaccessibility their historical terrain beyond that time

⁴ A. Wati Longchar & Yangkahow Vashum. 1998. *Tribal Worldview and Ecology*. TSC. Jorhat p. 57.

is given by the fact that Aos had no written script of their own. Aos, in the absence of written history and for that matter, absence of script, refer to their folkloristic text. On this, Takatemjen, gives an account of the way Ao *tarnunger otsu* serves as a link between the past and the present with its accounts of origin, tradition and culture.⁵

As such, oral historical traditions and for that matter, folktales, remains the sole links between the past and the present. Historical traditions talk of the origin of community, the activities of their ancestor and the feats of great men of the past.

Folktales construct the unwritten history of the Aos with a blend of myth, legend, and proverbial sayings. We need to look at a particular historical construct of the Aos to explain this phenomenon. *Longterok*, the much debated Ao account of origin is one of such instances. The Aos hold that they emerged out of six stones. A series of sayings and tales revolve around this myth.

There is a lot of ethicality and legality attached to the oral narratives. In certain instances of the tales the ethical is held synonymous with the legal. It is ethical for the Aos to respect the claim of the tales and the breach of this claim is dealt with by the customary Ao courts. A research scholar attempted to trace the origin of the Aos dismissing the claims of the *Longterok* account of the origin of the Aos and he was fined and the book banned by the Ao customary court of law. The same follows with the other types of oral narratives.

On the grounds of legality the academicians and the intellectuals are bound within the legality of the Ao ethics. There is a close affinity of the ethical and the legal for the Aos. Any breach of ethics incurs punishment from the customary institutions upheld by the community. It is ethical to have reverence and respect

⁵ Takatemjen. 1997. *Studies on Theology and Naga Culture*. CTC. Mokokchung. p. 7.

for the oral account of tales of on the legal level the academicians are restricted from rational questioning the validity of the oral accounts through various customary Ao institutions. In case an academician try to disproof the *Longerok* account of Ao origin, the person will be punished by the customary institutions upheld by the community.

Folktales and society: There is a great relation between folktales and society. “It is a commonly held opinion that oral literature is a kind of reflection of its society. This means that a direct relationship between society and its oral literature is assumed, society being the primary factor in the relationship and oral literature the secondary. The incidents mirror the life of the people and their occupations and social life may in part be reconstructed from these tales.⁶ a folktale is a text which may reflect the modal or typical mental contact of the people in a society; these are data that deal with states of mind.”

“The great works which were instrumental in the genre’s consecration as social record do not casually, or merely theoretically, express the cultural model that infuses them with their authority; they explicitly and insistently portray social reality as driven by a cultural engine that functions as the novel itself functions, specifying and coordinating private and collective experience through narrative mechanisms.”⁷ “Folklore is woven into the very fabric of our lives”.⁸ These narratives are important socially because human beings understand and describe their world through stories, and more than that, stories help the people to situate themselves as individuals and as groups in a given time. More significantly still, stories whether born of history, religion, science or myth tell us how to live and sometimes they tell us how to die.

⁶ Franz Boas. 1938. *General Anthropology*. New York. Heath. p. 622.

⁷ William Ray. 1990. *Story and History*. Basil Blackwell, Cambridge. p.6

⁸ Kathryn E.L. Denning. “Apocalypse past/future: archaeology and folklore, writ large” in Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius J. Holtorf etd. *Archaeology and Folklore*. Routledge. London. p.91.

With this assumption, *tarnunger otsu* can be seen as reflection of the Ao social community. They seem to reflect the social behaviors and norms within which the society operates. They represent the Ao society that it is a part of. What is the nature of representation? What is the extent of representation? “To what extent are the chosen texts representative of the society’s repertoire ...”⁹ Freed from the limitations of factual fidelity, assured of representing the biases of the culture, it depicts the Ao society by virtue of its own enclosure within the culture, Tarnunger otsu can formulate, analyze and illustrate general paradigms of social interaction explicitly. In other words tarnunger otsu instantiates or stands for the culture it depicts; in this case the tarnunger otsu can claim to ‘be’ history: it represents the system it represents. By virtue of its representational quality, a whole historicity can be seen in the *tarnunger otsu*.

In such a complex phenomenon as oral literature one has to ask what element in the literature plays the role of a ‘message’. What kind of message delivered by whom? To what kind of society should this message be brought and for what reason? In this case there can be found a “message in support of the existing social order. The message is delivered in the name of this social order and addressed to all its members. This message is a certain quality of the tale, but it should not be equated with the tale as a whole”.¹⁰

Folktales and culture: Culture can be defined as a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group: a way of life that is informed by a common spirit.¹¹ Here, culture is not the ‘property’ of individuals but of ethnic groups, communities or societies. Culture in this sense is in the plural.

⁹ Heda Jason & Dimitri Segal. 1977. *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton Publishers, The Hague. p. 264.

¹⁰ Jason, Heda & Segal, Dimitri. 1997. *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton, The Hague. p. 279.

¹¹ Raymond Williams. 1976. *Keywords*. London: Fontana, p. 80

Accordingly when we draw on this conception, the word 'culture' is accompanied by an adjective indicating the relevant group to which it belongs.¹²

The signification of the folktales can be seen as in terms of culture. This has to be understood in relation to the cultural pattern of a given community in question. One of folklore's eloquent adotates, Henry Glassie, has argued that the subject should play a central role in the understanding of human culture. For Glassie, folklore offers "a unified program for the study of human beings. Its base is the manifest reality the individual, the society, and the world. Its thrust is that what we call folklore is the central fact of what we call culture, and culture is the central fact of what we call history, and that people, history's force, create the phenomenon we study whatever name we give out discipline."¹³

However, the signification of culture of the tales is not explicit. How can one say that tales act as cultural connotation? In this case, AOs in the absence of written script refer to their folkloristic text for modes of their culture. Here, we are up against a problem: how can folktales act as cultural text? What is the basis of legitimacy of the folklore as historical documents? What is the basis of truth? These questions cannot be duly answered.

They are 'cultural messages' whose meanings are exclosed through different forces of modernization. This is a case of cultural change wherein things becomes rather meaningless with change in time.¹⁴ By understanding the 'message' contained in the tales, one comes to know and understand the culture and tradition of the community in question. "The study of folk culture and oral tradition can help in understanding accumulation, patterning of the relations between culture

¹² Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon. 1995. *cultural Politics: Class, gender, Race and the Postmodern World*. Blackwell. UK. p. 7.

¹³ Henry Glassie. 1982. *Passing the Time in Bally Memore Philadelphia*. University of Permsylvania Press.

¹⁴ Pierre Maranda. "Computers in the bush; tools for the automatic analysis of myths" in S. Helm ed. *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. P. 77-83.

and the environment, as also between culture and personality. Further it throws light on what is unique in the communities.”¹⁵ It portrays contemporary life, documents traditional behavior, reinforces systems of belief, and provides safety valves to release pent-up resentments.

The study of folk culture and oral tradition may contribute to our understanding of culture and its functioning in human societies. It may be of some help in understanding human psychology and the adjustment of the individual to his culturally constituted world. According to this opinion, we may expect that the dominant cultural interests are reflected in them.

Let us take folktales in the Jewish eastern culture. One group of tales, certain sacred legends, depicts man’s conflict with God. Another group tells about the miraculous deeds of saints, while a third group, certain fairy tales of this culture, awards high prizes prizes for the commission of crimes. The role such tales play in the society is hardly one of a didactic model either for children or for adults. The ordinary man in this culture is not expected to behave as a saint, to work miracles and still less to quarrel with God; there is a well no normative expectation of a prize for committing crimes. The ‘sacred’ tales play, in this case, a certain “function in relating the culture’s value system too the social structure and in strengthening the stability of the existing social order by supporting the official norms and their representatives – the saints”.¹⁶

Folktale and tradition: Practices generally build upon or react former practices, rather than starting from scratch. As the old adage goes, ‘there’s no point in reinventing the wheel’. Tales are rooted in long-standing traditions in the area. Whereas academic interpretations were modified, popular perceptions formed and independent, unchanging tradition. The influence of old traditions of *tarnunger otsu*

¹⁵ S.L. Srivastava. 1974. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. p. 4.

¹⁶ Heda Jason & Dimitri Segal. 1977. *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton Publishers The Hague, Paris. p. 278.

by no means implies that they are straight copies ancestral Ao concepts, on the contrary, they are reshaped to serve contemporary purpose. Today they provide escapism in the form of adventure and mystery, in a world which is increasingly perceived as lacking in these qualities; a sense of regional identity within a more and more globalised world view; and the justification for claiming the material benefits of this past by given tales.

Every time that a traditional song is sung, a tale is told and a name is mentioned, some cord of the people is struck and a process of recollection takes place. There are several aspects to this process, which are structured as to be self-supportive and self-renewing, which in turn reinforces the oral tradition and support it.

Folktale and Collective Identity: It has often been shown that folktales are very important in defining and maintaining the collective identities of human communities. Such communities can be either geographical (village, region, nation) or social (age profession, company) but in each case people would share a set of particular traditions such as language or dialect, place names, nicknames, skills, customs, beliefs and symbols. Such collective identities are often connected through the folktales which preach of community living.

Tarnunger otsu embodies the Ao identity. It tells them who they were, who they are and what they ought to be. A major problem with the Ao experience of the 'outside world' is that relating to their identity. How do the Aos in these varied forms of experiences retain their identity? This is a major problem of the Ao identity in question in the grip of new modes of experiences which is answered by folktales. Folktales with its multifaceted layers of culture of the Aos present as a text of reference of the Aos. They look into the tales to reassert their identity. The *tarnunger otsu* with its multi-faced spectrum of cultural connotation comes as text

of the Ao identity. But what is the logic of looking into a bygone culture to reassert one's identity? (nature of timelessness)

Tarnunger otsu as social dream: The Psychoanalytical analysis of Sigmund Freud leaned heavily on myths and fairy tales, taboos and jests and superstitions to support his explorations of the subconscious mind. The next step was the equation of dreams with myths and other kinds of folklore. If the dreams uncovered the infantile desires of the human being myths revealed psychic repressions of the childhood of the race. Jung as with Freud interprets myths and fairy tales by the method of symbolism. All men share in the 'collective conscious' what can be called arch types as against personal unconsciousness.

In myths and folktales, as in dreams and phantasies, Jung perceived shadow figures and situations representing the dark side of his personality. Witch here is to be interpreted as collective shadow figure, whose helpful side, revealed in the tales provides an emotional outlet for a repressed people

Another standpoint to approach the folktale as noted above is psychological. To Colby, a folktale "may function as a catharsis ... it may liberate one from the immediacy of his own situation ..."¹⁷ If the stories are to be psychoanalytic confessions of a whole society, the two, tales and society, have to have a direct relationship, that of a subject and of his fantasies which obviously have to be contemporary to each other. Thus the society is regarded as having directly produced, or at least remodeled, the oral literature now found in it. The society will in the future have other tales, just as it had other tales in the past.

Tarnungr otsu and the question of control: Culture, in many spheres can be seen as a mode of power play. Culture in this sense, is not a separate sphere, but a

¹⁷ Colby, Benjamin N.. The Analysis of Culture Content and the Patterning of Narrative Concerns in Texts. *American Anthropologist* 68: 374-388.

dimension of all institutions - economic, social and political. Culture is a set of material practices, which constitute meanings, values and subjectivities: the notion of the construction of subjectivities. In this dialectical form, it suggests that as human beings create culture, culture creates them: culture determines subjectivity.

Everything in social and cultural life is fundamentally to do with power. Power is at the center of of cultural politics. It is integral to culture. All signifying practices – that is, all practices that has meaning - involve relations to power. This mode of power play of culture subjects its members: they offer particular subject positions and modes of subjectivity.

Culture has a powerful role to play in shaping subjectivity and identity because it addresses much more than the rational selves. It helps to constitute the emotions, the sub-conscious and unconscious dimensions of the individual. Assuming the positions of a thinking, speaking, signifying subject involves attributing meaning to experience and opting for one mode of subjectivity amongst others available. The degree to which individuals can ‘choose’ forms of identity is circumscribed by social power relations.¹⁸

Folktales, in a way, try to undermine the power play of culture. It surfaces the unheard voices. It gives space of articulation for the excluded selves. History and culture are the fundamental aspects of the fabric of everyday life. They help to give us our sense of identity, telling us who we are, where we are from and where we are going. In any society the denial or marginalization of histories and cultures other than those of the dominant group has profound implications for subjectivity and identity.

Tamunger otsu can also probe into the question of control exercised by established social structure. These tales “put into question the assumption that human events are simply ‘given’; they reflect a growing fascination with the idea that much

¹⁸ William Ray. 1990. *Story and History*. Basil Blackwell, Cambridge. p. 17.

of what people take for granted as ‘normal’ or true is merely the reflection of shared cultural biases – prejudices that are inherited through tradition, reinforced by structures of authority and inculcated by habit”.¹⁹

Tarnunger otsu as voices of the excluded selves: Tarnunger otsu can be seen in relation to play of enclosure and enclosure in the traditional Ao systems. An individual who doesn’t fit into the matrix of the cultural norms is excluded. It goes to the extent of excommunication of the individual from the village. Folktales lend space to these unheard voices. These voices can be heard in terms of personal redress against the given society. Folktale in a way tries to undermine the power play of culture. It gives of articulation for the excluded or repressed others.

Tarnunger otsu, as such, presents the voices of the excluded others. Who are these excluded others? These are the individuals sidelined by the society, maltreated by the culture, or repressed by society. *Tarnunger otsu*, in certain cases, presents the ideas of these individuals. These are presented as agendas of cultural change.

Social protest: Some aspects of oral tradition serve as vehicle for social protest. The folk feel some sort of hesitation in making complaint directly against injustices, exploitations and oppressions, etc., but they find some solace through oral tradition. Through the tales, they show their anger and difficulties caused by injustice, exploitations and oppressions of the ruling power.²⁰

Tarnunger otsu as representational vehicle of the society: Willaim Ray assesses fictional narrative as representation of history which has a remarkable function and truth-value.²¹ To him, fiction suddenly emerges in the critical discourse as the primary vehicle for representing contemporary social reality, and even shaping

¹⁹Ibid. p. 4.

²⁰ S.L. Sivastava. 1974: *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. P.280.

²¹ William Ray, 1990, *Story and History*, Basil Blackwell Cambridge. P. 1.

the reality.²² With this we can say that folktales not only has an “effective impact superior to that of factual accounts, it has the very capacity to generate truths. Truth is always mediated by some motivation or agenda and hence perception in a pure state. The trait upon which all of its privileges are founded, is its representational accuracy influenced by passions and qualities of the community in question. The folktale’s promotion as a representational vehicle is linked to the increasing conviction that both individual and social truths are rooted in continually evolving codes of behavior, contents of belief, religious biases, and ethical assumptions.

Tarnunger otsu and social change: Social movements, population trends, urbanisation and mechanization are some of the elements that have determined social change. The validity of a society is dependent upon the course of its social change. Change is inevitable, but its direction is determined by each of us.²³

Western culture has brought changes in the folk cultures. The educated and emigrant youth (of the villages) are imitating the western way of life in their food, dress, etiquette, manners, modes of greeting, habits and behavior etc. Moreover, their norms, attitudes and values are also being formulated on the pattern of western culture. Education plays a vital role in shaping the attitudes of the people. In the Ao ancestral times, parents were averse in giving education to their children. They were feeling that by getting education the children would neither remain in their control, nor be helpful in increasing their family incomes. Besides, parents were scared that their children learn other cultures and attitudes alien to their own. With change of time, people are eager to get their children educated. With this there is a change in attitudes of the Ao community. There is a certain questioning of the traditional systems.

²² Ibid. p. 1.

²³ Gleen Jordan and Chris Weedon. 1995. *cultural Politics: Class, gender, Race and the Postmodern World*. Blackwell, UK. p. 40.

Economic –technique forces are also affecting folk culture in many ways. Market economy, migration to cities and transport and communication are some of the important economic technique forces which bring about significant changes in the folk societies. Market economy has helped in bringing changes in the social structure and system of the folk societies. The agricultural economy of the villages has been based on mutual co-operation, barter system and traditional mode of payment of various goods and services. The introduction of market economy has changed the traditional economic system of these villages, which in turn has affected the social relationships, way of life, values norms and attitudes of the folk.²⁴ Traditional modes of exchange are replaced by standard measurement. Helping each other in the fields has been replaced by wage system. This has led to the break down of the co-operate character of the village and the co-operate system of services and functions have begun to disappear gradually. The introduction of money economy in the folk societies has not only changed the attitudes of the folk towards the co-villagers but also towards the outsiders. It has changed the norms, values and attitudes of the folk, and has brought some disruption in the structuring of the family relationships and of the social and economic systems of the folk societies.”²⁵

Emigration is one of the most important factors of social change. It has plays a significant role in bringing about changes in the folk culture, i.e., in the views, attitudes values, norms, behavior and way of life of the folk. People go to towns, cities and industrial centers to earn their livelihood. These places generally are the centers of advanced culture. While living in such centers, the emigrants imbibe cultural traits of other areas and of other people, and when they come back to their own village they import not only the industrial goods but also new ideas, values, norms, behavior and way of living.

²⁴ S.L. Srivastava. 1974. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. p. 315 – 316.

²⁵ S.L. Srivastava. 1974. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. P. 318.

The emigrants adopt new way of life, which moulds their traditional attitudes, values and norms. The net result is the change in the traditional structure and function of the folk societies. And when they are back in the village, they follow their new habits as usual. Their changed norms and behavior give a great setback to the traditional social and moral codes of their family, caste and village. Emigration has lessened the villagers' faith in gods and deities, evil spirits, superstitions and traditional theories.²⁶ This is a case with the Aos.

Modes of transport and communication also bring in ideas of change into traditional societies. New roads and railways and the use of radios and postal facilities play a vital role in the transformation of the folk culture. Radio has also helped the folk to associate themselves with the happenings of other parts of the country and the world. Means of transport has helped people to travel across their geographical domain, thus giving them new experiences.

The traditional legal forces were working through village headmen, council of elders and powerful landlords, and were maintaining balance, peace and unity among the folk. But new political legal forces such as democratization, political parties, new panchayat system, and social legislation have altered their traditional and legal systems on account of which their old social relationships, values and attitudes, norms and social institutions of the folk are now changing to a great extent.

All these forces have brought many changes in the folk cultures by bringing about significant alterations in their economic, political and social systems. They have introduced money economy, economic independence and new right of land ownership in economic system; equal opportunity to all to get into power, and political awareness; and western elements, individualism, rationalism, and atheism in value system.

²⁶ S.L. Srivastava. 1974. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. P. 320.

***Tarnungr otsu* and change in Ao society in terms of change and continuity.** *Tarnunger otsu* basically responds to a tribal past. It is interesting to see the way the *tarnunger otsu* relates to an unwritten past of the Aos. Here the narrative seems to be engaged not primarily with historical facts as of dates but basically with culture. Culture in this context encompasses a broad area as of the ways of life, attitudes, mode of thinking and understanding. Beliefs and customs also form a part of it. But culture as we know is not static. It doesn't remain in the stage of tribal level. With constant flux of change culture undergoes tremendous, if not, significant change and transformation. Here things get renewed or changed, even the ways of life. This seems to displace the significance of the *tarnunger otsu* at a shallow level of understanding.

The basic question here will be what has folktales that basically respond to a bygone tribal culture got to do with a modern culture? This is the basic problematic of *tarnunger otsu* and cultural change. How can *tarnunger otsu* be seen when the cultural fabric of the community in question change. It will be better understood by studying the nature as also the forces and aspects of the cultural change. The forces seem to be gathered from within the community and also from outside. In other words the change takes place through both internal and external forces. Internal forces will relate to the change in mode of behavior, way of life, attitude, thinking and understanding. The later will relate to the outside forces as of other cultures. Both these forces work together in the evolution of 'another' culture. In this process, hybridization takes place with the best elements of both the forces. A culture doesn't go a complete change/transformation. It gathers the remnants of the past culture and fuses with the best of the one that is current. In the process the best of the bygone culture is ascertained. The traces of the best of the best part of that culture is not only retained but also appropriated. Now how can one now or decide what is best. In this process where the 'best' is upheld, *tarnunger otsu* comes into play. *tarnunger otsu* play a significant part for it is the text of timeless wisdom and understanding. It provides the best ingredients of that culture at the same time resists whatever is not

desirable. Now who decides the best ingredients in *tarnunger otsu*. One mode of understanding this is to see *tarnunger otsu* in terms of universality and timelessness. There are some elements in *tarnunger otsu* that always live beyond and across geographical boundaries and time limits.

Another problem is, how can the folktales be seen when the cultural fabric of the community in question change. It will be better understood by studying the nature as also the forces and aspects of the cultural change. The forces seem to be gathered from within the community and also from outside. In other words the change takes place through both internal and external forces. Internal forces will relate to the change in mode of behavior, way of life, attitude, thinking and understanding. The later will relate to the outside forces as of other cultures. Both these forces work together in the evolution of 'another' culture. In this process, hybridization takes place with the best elements of both the forces. A culture doesn't go a complete change/transformation. It gathers the remnants of the past culture and fuses with the best of the one that is current. In the process the best of the bygone culture is ascertained. The traces of the best of the best part of that culture is not only retained but also appropriated. Now how can one now or decide what is best. In this process where the 'best' is upheld, *tarnunger otsu* comes into play. *tarnunger otsu* play a significant part for it is the text of timeless wisdom and understanding. It provides the best ingredients of that culture at the same time resists whatever is not desirable. Now who decides the best ingredients in *tarnunger otsu*. One mode of understanding this is to see *tarnunger otsu* in terms of universality and timelessness. There are some elements in *tarnunger otsu* that always live beyond and across geographical boundaries and time limits. *tarnunger otsu* tries to ascertain these truths within the other towards a mode of hybridization.

Tarnunger otsu contains the codes of existence of the community. It not only reflects the percepts of the society but also directs the actions of the society. They are universal truths, which cannot wear out with passage of time and hence applicable to

any passing generation. Now 'timelessness' does not necessarily entail an idea of frozen time but brings home the idea of time that can never die out: of eternity.

Tarnungr otsu and pragmatics. Folktales can be seen in relation to its multifaceted uses in relation to social function. "In every society the significance attached to oral tradition is connected with its social role or with the social function which it fulfils. Oral tradition survives in a particular society only because it fulfils certain function. The various aspects of oral tradition such as folk-song, ballad, epic-lays, folk-tale, myths, legend, proverb, riddle etc. provide good recreation or amusement to the people.

Functional approach is a persuasive approach to folklore studies which questions of origin and distribution to concentrate of the role played by folklore in a given culture. It is concerned with how folklore contributes to the maintenance of social institutions. Simply how does folklore function in a culture. Particularly American cultural anthropologists have espoused this theory. Franz Boas, father of American Anthropology was so much a functionalist in demonstrating the diffusion of oral narratives from tribe to tribe at points of culture contact. He claimed that tribal narratives mirrored the ethnography of the culture.

A tale is not a dictated text with interlinear translation, but a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for such cultural purposes as reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressor through factory, pedagogical explanations of the natural world, and application of pressure for conventional behavior. Validation of belief, conduct, and ritual is another function performed by the tribal folklore.

Another use of *tarnungr otsu* is entertainment. They play an important role in amusement for the people. The old persons tell stories ideal men and women to the the members of the community. From such stories on the one hand the children get amusement and on the other hand unconsciously their mind absorbs the influential

elements of tales, which through their fancy become the part and parcel of their personality structure. The life history of worldly heroes presents some moral and behavioral instances before the folk in modifying their behaviour in accordance with the need of their community.²⁷

²⁷ S.L. Srivastava. 1974. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition*. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi. P.278

Chapter 4

PERFORMATIVE SPACES OF *TARNUNGER OTSU*.

The title of this chapter puts stress on two important aspects of *tarnunger otsu* – ‘performance’ and ‘spaces’. In other words, emphasis is also laid upon the activity – performance of the folktales. We will deal with it before venturing into the problem of spaces. Since there are two major modes of narration of the folktales, as discussed in the introductory chapter, – oral and written, these will be also dealt separately.

The oral form of the *tarnunger otsu* takes us close to the natural form of the *tarnunger otsu*. ‘Natural’, because the *tarnungwer otsu* has always been told by a raconteur to an audience in a specific space. ‘Close’ to the natural form, because the original composer and narrator of the *tarnunger otsu* is anonymous and their act can only be assumed.

Here we are concerned with the raconteur and the listener in action. It is then imperative that we take into account the performance of the raconteur and listener of folktales. There should be no confusion as to whether it should be called speaking or performing. Even within speaking or narrating, performing comes in; for the gesture and expression of the folklorist comes into play in the act of telling. As a consequence I use ‘performing’ as well as ‘speaking’ interchangeably. Performance relates to the narrative act: the raconteur in action. The language, posture, gesture and expression of the narrator make up the performance. This act adds significance and meaning to the tales. As an example of raconteur in its act of narration, here is the record of a researcher’s field trip.

“It is however an unforgettable experience to hear an Anansi tale told by a good native teller of tales to an appreciative audience. Typical is the tale of ‘Anansi and Tiger’, which I heard in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica a few years ago. Men, women and children were crowded into the small room and overflowed onto the narrow porch. Some squatted on the floor; some stood around the walls; children, black eyes wide, sat at their parents’ feet; the bed in the corner was loaded with women and babies. All were silent, intent on the storyteller, Arthur Whyles. Mr. Arthur Whyles was sixty-one, his hair white and kinky like sheep’s wool. His eyes were unforgettably very large, very black, and remote, expressionless. He stood throughout the story, constantly moving about. First he would be at one side of the room taking the part of the Anansi; then he would jump quickly to the other and face the back as he took the role of the tiger. His voice was whining and ingratiating as Anansi. His face took on a smirk; his words were given a wheedling twist. But when he became Tiger, he drew himself up stern and dignified and majestic; his voice was deep and powerful and his walk stately. His story ends with a fight between tiger and death. Mr. Whyle, voice full of excitement, arms failing, staged the fight, blow by blow, taking he parts alternately of Tiger and of death. When the climax was reached and Tiger Delivered the knockout blow conquering Death, the narrator over-reached himself and his clutched fist gave a cruel blow that bloodied his knuckles. He seemed to feel nothing but went into the very realistic death throes of Brother Death. Though the audience had heard this story many time, they sat enthralled, eyes shining, audibly satisfied with the ending.”¹

Acting is intrinsic to narrating. Every word is accompanied by certain action, gesture or expression of the narrator. It is not actually the words but the gestures that draw attention of the listeners and give greater significance to the tales. The action of the narrator is multiple – facial expression, gesture, posture, etc. The narrator also assumes different characters and as such takes up multiple roles. The narrative act then becomes sort of a mono act.

¹ A. Donald Macdonald, 1972. “Collecting Oral Literature”, in *Folklore and Folklife*, ed., Richard M. Dorson. The University of Chicago press. p. 408.

In the activity of narration, both the narrator and listener are caught up together in the act. Here, in the act of telling, is the “characterisation and the drama, absent in the story when merely read, no abundantly supplied”.² The narrator and spectator are in a constant act of communication and ‘negotiation’. The communication takes place at the level of the environment – social and cultural. They communicate through narrative gestures and responsive gestures. The narrator tries to ‘negotiate’ with the listener his ideology and motive through his act of telling. However, the control over the tale by the raconteur is in a way limited because the tale spills over the raconteur’s telling.

It is a constant process of construction. A process of telling. A constant negotiation and re-negotiation between the unstable self and the unstable listener. Unstable, because their minds are constantly working and reworking, making and unmaking. It is not a self enclosing narrative act. It explores the unstable relationship between the recounted and the listener. Speaking self is negotiating with an outside self. In this context there is the construction of a negotiation. As subject (raconteur) negotiates with the object (listener), we are having a construction of the self and the other. The tale then unfolds towards the construction of both the raconteur and the listener.

The environment also comes into play in the construction of the selves and of the tale’s significance. This construct is in relation to a larger cultural construct. A cultural relationship works out in this process. The cultural environment include society, tradition, community’s lived experiences, etc.

What is the role of the performance of the listener in the creation of meaning? Without the listener’s intervention, the raconteur’s act would become flat. They are not simply passive, sharing common environmental grounds with the raconteur, but actively participate in the creation of meaning. The listener responds to the ‘activity’ of the raconteur through gestures of approval and disapproval. A “sociability of participatory listening”³ where their gestures and expressions are important factors in the creation of meaning of the

² Ibid. p. 408.

³ Veronica Gorog – Karady, “The New Professional Storyteller in France” in *Storytelling in Contemporary Societies*. Etd., Lutz Krich and Sabine Wienker – Piepho. Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen: Narr, 1990. p. 175.

folktales. Another important aspect in the participatory performance is the psychic faculty of the listener. The listener will respond to the act of the narrator depending on its mental state.

For the purpose of our study we shall base the performative space of orality of *tarmunger otsu* upon the traditional or conventional mode. Within this mode there is possibility of multiple spaces. A simple act of conversation between two persons can consist of a space. Even a personal act as for example, narrating a tale to a friend can be called a performative act, and as such consist of a performative space. There can be numerous such instances. This can only defined in relation to the Ao traditional performance of *tarmunger otsu*. The Aos since ancestral times don't compose and narrate tales on the lines of personal whims and fancy.⁴ There is a kind of 'convention' attached to the Ao traditional narratives which will help us understand the aspect of definite spaces. From this we can infer that the *tarmunger otsu* and the community upholding it resist any individual modification. Secondly, the act being social, the spaces of performance are limited. Here the social implies the cultural and traditional construct of the Ao community. What I am trying to establish here is that the performative space is legitimized as a social sphere. The performative of *Tarmunger otsu* in the context of orality is socially and culturally sanctioned and accepted. Who decides this? The culture and the tradition of the community. The tradition of the *tarmunger otsu* also upholds this. The socially accepted spaces of performance of *tarmunger otsu* are discussed below.

Arju: The most important performative space of *tarmungr otsu* is *arju*. The narrator is a senior member of the *arju* who normally has higher capabilities in relation to Ao modes of life. The tales serve as mode of instruction in moral, ethical and behavioral norms of the community. Secondly, they also act as means of entertainment.

Festival: During festivals, the older folks along with other merry activities, would narrate the tales. The younger generation would gather around and listen to them. Here *tarmunger otsu* functions as entertainment adding amusement to the festivity and also as instruction in social norms.

⁴ N. I. Jamir, 1993. "Jili O" in N. Talitemjen Jamir, *Asen Sobalibaren*. Neeta Prakashan, new Delhi. p.7.

Workplace: The Aos have a social leaning towards work. They always work in groups. This happens specially during sowing and harvesting. These two activities takes the turn of merrymaking. The works are carried out accompanied with songs, dances and narration of folktales. Normally the older folk narrates the tales. Even womenfolk take the part of narrators.

Bed: The mothers act as narratos. The tales are narrated to put to sleep their young ones. They also act as instruction in moral codes for the young ones. This prepares the young ones in social norms and moral values before their entry into the *arju*.

Can the written form of folktales be called performance? Writing includes the creativity and originality of the writer: its ideas, concepts and percepts. On this account, writing can also be called as performing. Then is it obvious that its corresponding act of reading can be also called performing? Performance here will pertain to the working and reworking in the mind of the writer and reader respectively the creation of meaning.

If in the Ao tradition of oral narratives, as had been discussed, new narratives cannot be composed, where is the scope of the writer's performance? The writer simply has to reproduce an old tale. Here the aspect of modification of the tales on the part of the writer can be considered as the performance of the writer. The modifications does not change the basic structure of the tale despite certain modifications. We would have different versions of the same tale.

The performance space of the written form rests on the mental domain of the writer. Again the artistic trait of the writer comes into play. This encompasses the writer's creativity, commitment, personal attachment and his milieu.

The reader plays an important role in creation of meaning in the written form of the folktales. First, reading is predominantly a private activity and as such a mental activity. Signification depends on the psychical state and the cultural environment of the reader. Second, the tale opens up to multiple interpretations. In this regard the *tarmunger otsu*

becomes obscure which in itself is a quality. This is where the political quality of the tales comes up – the open ended quality of art.

What we have here is tales open to multiple interpretations. We approach the idea of text where the original meaning goes out. It is available for ever-new interpretations. The act of reading then becomes a democratic process. Democratic in the sense that the reader has the liberty to interpret the tale. It is this ‘democratic’ sense that paves the way for the political aspect of *tarmunger otsu*. The very act of the reader is to be an eavesdropper. This is where the political quality of the tales comes up.

Where is the relationship of the writer and the reader as in the oral form of the folktales? In the written form, the writer is not immanent. The writer does not have control over the reader’s response. The only connecting factor between them seems to be the written tale which is open to interpretations depending not on the writer but on the reader.

What could be the possible spaces of the written form of *tarmunger otsu*. In other words, where can the tales be written? Any writer can transcribe folktales into writing anywhere. The only difference would be that the writing or the rewriting in this case would be limited to *tarmunger otsu*. The writing can take place anywhere – in library, in reading room, etc.

The reading space: Reading can also take place anywhere – in classroom, library, bedroom, study, train, etc.

The tradition of orality of *tarmunger otsu* is fast disappearing with the flourishing of the written form. The method of delivery and emphasis also calls our attention. “The oral form depends much on gestures and memory to describe and sustain the ideas, whereas in the written form, the concrete nature of words provide the necessary pause to reflect and recognise the thought process. The words are subjected to a variety of combinations to formulate the object of discourse from a vast universe of signification.”⁵ We come up with a

⁵ Lemtila Alinger.1998. *Semiotics of Naga Folktales*, M.Phil. Dissertation. CLE/SLLCS, JNU, New Delhi.

problem here. What happens to the content and mode of emphasis when they move away from the oral to the written form?

What is the content and emphasis of the *tarnunger otsu* in the different spaces. Does the change in the performative space change the content of the folktales. Here we have to look into different layers of the content. First is the structural content – words, sentences, characters, actions and story. This does not seem to undergo any change. The same words, sentences, characters and the story remain the same except minor modifications emerging out of the writer or the performer. Second is the content in cultural signification.

The important problem to tackle here is the change in content relating to signification. We should also look at the engagements of the tales within a specific space and vice-versa. We are aware that the folktales have different cultural aspects – moral, ethical and even legal. Now we should see which of these domains is magnified and which one is diminished in a given performance space. With the change in space there is shift in focus (moral, ethical and legal) and also in the signification. Some signifying aspects get diminished while others get magnified. There is no strict rule as to the limitation of the tales within the framework of any performative spaces but the performative spaces seem to own have its appropriate tales. There are tales that fit the *arju* better while there are others that go best with the bedtime space.

There are differences in content and emphasis as we move across the spaces. Again, even if the same tale is seen across the spaces, the emphasis seems different. Let us see the tale of the *Three water creatures*⁶ across these different spaces. In the performative space of *arju* this tale emphasize on the social ideal of selfless sacrifice. In the performative space of the bed, the tale will take the value of fantasy directed towards amusement.

It is the social environment that demands corresponding tales and emphases. This will pertain to the environment of the specific space. We have shown that every space has a different environment. *Arju* space has its own social environment and the same goes with other spaces. The narrator will narrate taking into account of the listeners' 'environment'

while the listener will respond depending upon his/her environment. E.g. The social environment of bedtime space will demand a kind of tale with amusement that will suit the child's interest.

Another important issue is whether the folktales are confined only to the oral and the written forms? It is also important that the "communicative channels have changed, today we are far less dependent on oral transmission than earlier generations."⁷ We no longer depend on the "fellowship between storyteller and the audience".⁸ With the emergence of mass media in the modern world there are numerous spaces have opened up. There are lots of possibilities of storytelling in contemporary society. We receive narrative material through radio, television, internet, newspapers, magazines and books. This means that storytelling activity becomes more and more professionalised.

What we notice is shift in the modern world in the nature of the public sphere. A shift from an intimate social-performative situation to a more private and rather industrialised as well as domesticated sphere, of the mass media, which is nevertheless, social and public.

⁷ Reimund Kvideland, "Storytelling in Modern Society" in *Storytelling in Contemporary societies* ed., Lutz Rohrich and Sabine Wienker – Piepho. Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen: Narr, 1990. p. 17.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 17.

Chapter 5

TARNUNGER OTSU AND RESPONSES

The author is dead and the text as well. This phenomenon can rightly be said of *tarnunger otsu*. The original composers of the *tarnunger otsu* are anonymous: as good as dead. They have no control over the structural contents and signification of the tales. The *tarnunger otsu*, in the past Ao society responded within a fixed framework of signification. With constant encounter with other forces, the static framework of signification arrive at a point of rupture. The closed frame of the *tarnunger otsu* is let open and loose.

The primary essence and signification of the tales emerge out of its 'boundary'. The tales crosses its border and harbours in the margins of other realms.¹ 'Margins', because *tarnunger otsu* is accorded less space in the other domains at the initial stage of dissimination. Then encounter of the *tarnunger otsu* and 'others' takes place. The 'others' comprise of narratives, cultures, traditions and communities and personalities. With this 'encounter', *tarnunger otsu* begins to be seen in terms of other cultures: new modes.

The *tarnunger otsu* is intruded by the other cultures which marks the moment of rupture of the closed framework of *tarnunger otsu*. The moment of encounter of *tarnungr otsu* and these 'others' questions the frozen structure of *tarnunger otsu* and the tales are opened towards newer interpretations.

¹ J. Hillis Miller. *Border Crossings: Translating Theory*. p. 105.

The *tarnunger otsu* also has in themselves potential for multiple connotations, applicable to different situations. It makes possible for the *tarnunger otsu* to create newer spaces in the other cultures, traditions, and communities after the moment of rupture: the *tarnunger otsu* moves from the 'margins' towards 'mainstream' of the 'others'.

This process of rupture is continuous. It happens with cultures, communities and singularities all the time. The rupture occurs within the Ao community and Aos also. Every time, the Ao community is faced with new mode of culture, there is bound to be a rupture in the signification of the tales. This has happened in two major instances. One was the moment when Christianity was introduced to the Aos. Second, western Education which rationalized the Ao belief system. With these aspects of encounter, the fixed signification of *tarnunger otsu* undergoes a change. There is a whole linearity of this aspect of rupture and dissemination.

The process of rupture also happens with Aos in terms of singularities. With the influx of modern trends of life, Aos start to disseminate in physical and mental terms. In other words, Aos move out of their original geographic spaces and settle in other realms and lay open to varied experiences. Their understanding of *tarnunger otsu* undergoes tremendous change.

The tales are disseminated in the form of contextualization and appropriation within different cultural and personal situations. In other words, newer forms and modes of interpretations come up corresponding to the personal experiences and cultural situations.

These interpretations can be seen in terms of responses. What could be the nature of responses? Responses can be of two fold. One can be the responses of the tales to the Ao community and the world at large. To the Ao community it could be the reflection of the lived experiences of the Aos since time immemorial. Second, it can pertain to the responses of different individuals and communities to *tarnunger otsu*.

Since the first category of response, i.e., responses of *tarnunger otsu*, has been dealt in two of the chapters from different perspectives, the second category will be studied here.

Change in terms of individuals and community. The Ao community, as has been discussed in the introductory chapter, have been open to multiple forces of change and new modes of experiences. To name a few - contact with the outside world, other Naga tribes, neighboring states, Christianity, western education and different modes of modernization.

In these various modes of experiences Aos go through a process of change. The change that takes place as a result of clash, or rather, encounter with other cultures. What happens when Aos encounter other cultures and new modes of experiences? What happens when Ao tribal religion faces Christianity? Christianity that was introduced to the Aos in the later part of the nineteenth century was that of the western understanding of Baptist denomination of the west. A religion with the basis of Western culture. English language comes first. The American missionaries taught not only their language but also learned the Ao language. In the meantime they taught the English language to the Aos. With this, the Ao language came to be written in the English script.

The major change that took place was with that of religion. Christian religion with its beliefs, norms and other teachings on way of life found means to replace a lot of the Ao tribal practices starting with 'barbaric' headhunting to other 'primitive' modes of life. In all these processes comes different forms of hybridization takes place?

The Aos goes through a process of process of dissemination. Dissemination here has two connotations. First, Dispersal in the form of migration of the Aos for economic, educational and professional reasons. Second, it is the dissemination of the Ao culture through migration. However our field of interest is on the clash of the Ao culture with that of the other cultures which they encounter. What happens with Aos in their experience of other cultures? Do they shed off their 'old' culture or forget their 'old' culture? Or does any mode of hybridization takes place?

Response of *tarnunger otsu* to Ao identity in the flux of change. Aos go to the past to ascertain of their ethnic identity. The past is seen in the oral tradition. One of which is the *tarnunger otsu*. The Ao traditional practices, norms, manners, etc are all enshrined in the *tarnunger otsu*. So the *tarnunger otsu* responds to the issue of identity.

Human beings understand and describe their world through stories, and more than that, because stories help us to situate ourselves, as individuals and as groups, in time. More significantly still, stories – whether born of history, religion, science or myth – tell us how to live. And sometimes, they tell us how to die.² The Aos have been in a flux of change through various forces. The *tarnunger otsu* tries to ascertain the values and aspirations of the community in the mechanism of change. This happens in different areas – education, religion, polity and administration, to name a few.

Another major problem with the Ao experience of the ‘outside world’ is that relating to their identity. How do the Aos in these varied forms of experiences retain their identity? This is a major problem of the Ao identity in question in the grip of new modes of experiences which is answered by *Tarnunger otsu*. The *tarnunger otsu* with its multi-faced spectrum of cultural meanings also responds to the Aos in the form of the ‘text’ of their identity. Folktales with its multifaceted layers of culture of the Aos present as a text of reference of the Aos. They look into the tales to reassert their identity.

Tarnunger otsu and change. *Tarnunger Otsu* basically responds to a tribal past. It is interesting to see the way the *Tarnunger Otsu* relates to an unwritten past of the Aos. Here the narrative seems to be engaged not primarily with historical facts as of dates but basically with culture. Culture in this context encompasses a broad area as of the ways of life, attitudes, mode of thinking and understanding. Beliefs and customs also form a part of it. But culture as we know is not static. It doesn’t remain in the stage of tribal level. With constant flux of change culture undergoes tremendous, if not, significant change and transformation. Here things get renewed or changed, even the ways of life. This

² Kathryn E.L. Denning, “Apocalypse: Past/Future” in Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius Holtorf ed. *Archaeology and Folklore*. London and New York, Routledge. P. 91.

seems to displace the significance of the *Tarnunger Otsu* at a shallow level of understanding.

Ao community and dissemination: Majority of the Ao population is concentrated in villages. The remaining, excepting a marginal few percentage of the population, are settled in towns of as Mokokchung, Kohima, Dimapur and in comparatively smaller number in other towns of Nagaland. The marginal few are scattered in the neighboring states of Nagaland and in the metro cities of India.

Ao community and varied experiences: The Aos living in different localities, towns and cities have varied experiences. Their way of living and mode of thinking are shaped by their environment. This results in different cultural attachments. Folktales respond differently in these differed realms of experiences. The rural dwellers have closer affinity to the Folktales, while in the urban areas people have lesser affinity to the tales. As has been discussed, even though *tarnunger otsu* basically relates to the identity of the ancestral Aos, the *tarnunger otsu* with its aspects/elements of timelessness the Aos throughout generations draw definition of their identity from the folktales. This directs and shapes the identity of the Aos in their differed modes of experience and existence. When there arises the question of identity, the *Tarnunger otsu* serves as the basis. *Tarnunger otsu* is a meeting point of the Aos of different realms and experiences. Aos, wherever they go, whatever they be, they have certain inherent attitudes in them, which is ascertained by the timeless elements of *Tarnunger otsu*.

***Tarnunger otsu* and the response of the community:** During the past the Aos had a common response to the *Tarnunger otsu*. It contained their shared experiences and ideals. That seem to direct the way o life of the Aos. Thus the *Tarnunger otsu* served as the 'text' of Aos relating to morals, ethics, behavior and norms of existence. They tell us who we are, how we should live and how to die.

***Tarnunger otsu* in terms of my own singularity:** What is the idea of singularity? This entails one's own self - an individual as opposed to a group of individuals. My own singularity entails my experience as an autonomous self in the grip of varied experience

and the way I respond to *tarnunger otsu* in such modes of experiences. While as a child, I heard a lot of *tarnunger otsu* from my mother. I didn't comprehend why they were told. The stories would unfold – 'once upon a time...' and would end, 'and they happily lived ever after / and till today it is done so'. They were always followed by morality of good and bad, dos and don'ts, ethical and unethical. They were easy to understand and good enough to draw inspiration.

Looking at it now the narratives hold different levels and layers of understanding. First, there is this mother trying to sleep away her child/ trying to build a close relationship with her child/spending time with her child. We also have the parent inculcating good attitudes in her child through moral tales. Whatever the motives, they can be understood better through the way it is told. We have this mother stooping low to the level of the child. She tells in such a way that not only the child understands but also gets interested in the tales. The tales get settled in the child's mind as beautiful stories attached with morals. Now, this understanding gains momentum towards other understandings. As I grew up I felt those 'good', 'dos' and 'ethical' working in my mind in every action of mine. I saw my actions and thoughts being directed through those learning and hence becoming a part of my character and personality. As a mature man I begin to realize that the morals contained in my mother's narrated tales contained the best part of the Ao culture. Now it becomes easy for me to say that I am an Ao by the way I eat, live, think and exist. Even my principle and ideologies, to a certain level, seem to have affinity to the morals contained in the *tarnunger otsu*. *Tarnunger otsu* as a medium of instruction: To be good, to do the ethical, to do the right for the child can also come through direct instructions. Can't they? This seems to be better worked through the folktales. The folktales basically serve as an entertainment and hence gather to the interest of the child. With the tales come the instructions in the form of morals. Also in the folktales, every good deed comes with a reward and every bad deed is punished. This play of reward and punishment indirectly gets ingrained in the child's mind. The 'good' and 'bad' attached in the folktales with play of reward and punishment attains greater significance and importance as the child grows up to adulthood. These morals work in the mind of the adult to resist several 'bad' others. Again as the adult grows up into a man the morals move to communal level. The morals of 'good', 'ethical', and 'dos'

become marks of good member/citizen in the man's relationship with fellow beings of the community.

Tarnunger otsu in terms of others' singularities: Here is an account of interviews I conducted personally with Aos and non-Aos -and other Nagas and individuals belonging to other nationals who have an understanding of the *tarnunger otsu*. These interviews were carried out in person, through telephone, postal service and e-mail.

Interviews with the Aos were conducted in accordance to age and geographical location.

From the answers given to the questionnaire, the responses to *tarnunger otsu* is Multiple. People give different responses according to geographical locations, according to age, according to personal experience and intellectual capacity. On the whole, the older folks seem to have a closer affinity to the meaning of the *tarnunger otsu*.

As we move from the In all these aspects, there is a shift from a holistic understanding to a disseminated dispersal of understandings. In the Ao ancestral times the folktales respond to a generalized understanding of the community. With the varied experiences of Aos within historical and geographical time and space frames there is varied understandings and as such different aspects of signification. As we know signification depends not only on the signifier but also largely upon the environment and the psyche of the perceiver of the signs of ancestral times to the modern to the post-modern times of the Ao community, the engagements of the folktales are disseminated towards a broader spectrum of signification and wider coverage of consumerism.

There is rupture of the frozen structure of signification of the *tarnunger otsu*. Rupture takes places at different levels. At the level of culture, community and singularity. With this there is distantiation, displacement, hybridization and contextualization takes place in the signification of the *tarnunger otsu*.

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR AOS

Please leave out questions that are not applicable to you. The questionnaire necessitates some knowledge of folktales in general and of *tarnunger otsu* (folktales of the Ao tribe) in particular. In case *tarnunger otsu* is new to you, please answer the questions with reference to the samples of *tarnunger otsu* attached with this questionnaire. The questions may be answered either in Ao or in English or both.

Name :

Age :

Village :

Town / city :

Qualification :

Profession :

Marital status:

1. *Tarnunger otsu teratet kechi?* (What is the meaning of *tarnunger otsu*?)

2. *Tarnunger otsu ya shibai / shirnoki mejem?* (Who composed the *tarnunger otsu*?)

3. *Tarnunger otsu tasen ano mejemtsu mesera bendenloktsu akok na?* (Can new *tarnunger otsu* be composed and added?)

4. *Tarnunger otsutem ya melenshitsu akok na?* (Can the *tarnunger otsu* be modified and changed?)

5. *Tanu temelenshiba putu nung tarnunger otsu ya Aor asaoshi kechi nungsa nungdak?* (What is the use/need relevance of *tarnunger otsu* with Aor in the modern world?)

6. *Ne kicha takum nung tarnunger otsu ya kechi nung nungdak?* (What is the need / relevance of *tarnunger otsu* in your personal life?)

7. *Tarnunger otsu dak sundakba nung ano tashitsu kar lir na?* (Do you have more to say in relation to *tarnunger otsu*?)

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NON-AOS

Please leave out questions that are not applicable to you. The questionnaire necessitates some knowledge of folktales in general and of *tarnunger otsu* (folktales of the Ao tribe) in particular. In case *tarnunger otsu* is new to you, please answer the questions with reference to the samples of *tarnunger otsu* attached with this questionnaire. The questions may be answered either in Ao or in English or both.

Name :

Age :

Marital status:

Village :

Tribe :

Town / city :

Nationality :

State :

Religion :

Qualification :

Profession :

Marital status :

How would you define folktales?

3. Have you heard about the Ao community?

4. Have you ever heard of *tarnunger otsu*?

4. In your own reading and understanding of *tarnunger otsu*, what similarities do you find in it with your tribal/traditional/national or other genres of folktales?

5. In your own reading and understanding of *tarnunger otsu*, do you find any dissimilarities with your tribal/traditional/national folktales? Give with reasons.

6. In your own reading and understanding of *tarnunger otsu*, do you find any dissimilarities with your tribal/traditional/national folktales? Give reasons.

7. What do you think is the importance and significance of *tarnunger otsu* for the Ao community?

8. Do you think *tarnungeer otsu* has still got significance in the contemporary world?

(a) If no, give reasons.

(b) If yes Give reasons

9. Don't you think that the influx of modern mass media has usurped the place of *tarnungeer otsu*?

12. Do you have any other responses to *Tarnunger otsu*?

TARNUNGER OTSU SAMPLES

1. Brewing Tree

Once, in a family, the mother died leaving behind her husband and a young son. As time went, the father fell in love with a woman and married her. After a year, they were blessed with a son. As the sons grew up, the stepmother developed a disliking towards the stepson. The younger son was given the best possible food while the stepson was not. The stepson was given tough works while her son was given easy ones. Whenever the stepson went to the field to work, he was always given a sachet containing rotten rice for lunch. The young boy, in his anger, usually tied the sachet of rotten rice on the trunk of a tree. Thus, he always worked in the field without having lunch.

One day as he was approaching the tree to tie the sachet of rotten rice, he got a sweet aroma around the tree. On further inspection around the tree, he found out that the sweet aroma was coming from the sachets tied over the tree trunk. The sachet smelt so tempting that he opened and tasted it.

Every time he went to the field, he ate the sweet scented rice to his appetite. As time passed by, he developed a handsome body and a fair complexion. The stepmother wondered as to why her son, who was always given good food, did not develop a handsome body and fair complexion as compared to that of the stepson who was rather fed with rotten rice.

She could not comprehend it and asked the stepson, "what do you usually eat?" The stepson replied, "I tie the rotten rice to a tree and I eat it when it smells tasty". The stepmother said, "bring that tree". So he brought a branch of the tree and gave her. The stepmother grinded the bark and leaves of the branch, mixed it with cooked rice and stored it. After some days it smelt good which was found it very tasty to eat. Since then, the bark and leaves of that tree are used for brewing wine.

2. Hind and Earring

Once upon a time *Lichaba* (One of the gods of Ao ancestral belief attributed to the creation of the world and believed to intervene in the world with acts of bountiful blessings to the righteous needy.) invited all the animals to dance in his courtyard. Hind went out in search of costumes to go to the dance at the courtyard of her grandpa. Thence, her friend, Fox, gave her a *tongpang* (a kind of earring worn by ancestral Ao womenfolk) having stolen from Squirrel. Hind happily brushed and placed the *tongpang* over a stone to dry and waited impatiently.

But Squirrel was searching for her *tongpang* all over the ground below and spotted it being dried over a stone. In her anger at the sight, she swung a twig at the *tongpang* and broke it.

When time approached to go for the dance, Hind went to get the *tongpang* and found it broken. In her angry act of hopping and jumping, she accidentally trampled down the sleeping Earthworm into two pieces. Earthworm, with unbearable pain of death shagged all over and broke

Bird's egg. Bird, in its agony was scattering the ground when *Lichaba* threatened and asked her why she was scattering his field. The bird replied, "grandpa, Earthworm came and broke my egg when I was hatching it". So, *Lichaba* picked up Earthworm and asked why. The latter replied, "grandpa while I was taking a nap in the sun, Hind trampled me down to two pieces and as I was shagging all over with severe pain of death, I broke the egg unintentionally". On asking Hind, she replied, "in order to come to your courtyard to dance I had washed and placed the *tongpang* over a stone to dry whereupon Squirrel threw a twig and broke it". When asked, the squirrel replied that while she was searching around for her *tongpang*, she saw it being dried over a stone and in her anger threw a twig at it. At last *Lichaba* asked Hind, "from where did you get the *tongpang*?" "Grandpa, when I was searching a *tongpang* in dire need for the dance at your courtyard, Fox brought the *tongpang* and gave me", replied Hind. *Lichaba* caught Fox and scolded for stealing Squirrel's *tongpang* and closed him in a cage. Then he went off to fetch hot water to splash it over Fox.

Before *Lichaba* returned, Fox howled from the cage thus, "o! Ye all wanting to eat meat and fish be assembled here". Hearing this call, Jackal crawled over and stood near the cage. Seeing this, Fox asked, "friend, what do you want to eat most?" Jackal replied, "friend, I like chicken best". Thence, Fox replied, "I'll give it to you, but first open this cage". When opened, Fox told jackal, "friend I'll go to get chicken, so you get into this cage and wait". After Jackal got into the cage, Fox closed it in and fled happily.

Shortly, *Lichaba* returned with the hot boiled water and splashed it over the cage. Jackal in pain cried out, "grandpa it's me" and as he opened

the cage, *Lichaba* found his grandson burnt with the hot water. Then, *Lichaba* let out Jackal saying, "today also in place of Fox, my grandson has been hurt".

3. The four Water Creatures.

Once upon a time in *Chongliyimti*, there were four fresh water creatures, namely, crab, frog, prawn and *tsusepsang*, a kind of water creature, who were good friends. They decided to work in their fields together in turns. On the first day, they went to the field of the crab. At midday, when it was time to cook meal, the crab went to her kitchen. She thought of cooking the best meal for her friends that day. She placed the pot on the oven but had nothing to cook. She felt very ashamed that she had nothing to offer her friends. And so, in order to make her curry delicious, she took off and cooked one of her legs. During meal, the friends found it so delicious that the crab was entrusted to cook the coming days also. The next day also, the crab cooked one of its legs. The same continued for a few days. A day came when the crab had nothing to put so it climbed the *machan* above the fire to check out if there was any food there to cook. The crab slipped and fell off into the pot and got cooked.

The three friends waited for the crab to call them for meal, but it never did. Finally, they decided to go to the kitchen to eat. They searched for the crab in and around the kitchen in vain. Incidentally, the frog looked into the pot and to its shock, saw the crab been cooked. At that sight, the frog choked with laughter and as she tried to control herself, her backbone

broke and got bent and her neck got swollen as it is today. The prawn also looked into the pot and in her shock and despair, began to step backwards, which became her nature. Finally, *tsusepsang* looked into the pot and was frightened so much that it closed its mouth in fear with its two hands and thus its hands became attached to its mouth for good.

4. The Forsaken Daughter.

Once in an Ao village its chief had two pretty daughters. The elder came of age for marriage. Her name was talked about a lot in the village and many young men in and around the village admired her. To the utter shock and dismay of the family and the village, the chief's wife died of illness. As a consequence, the daughter's marriage slipped away for she couldn't leave her father in that state of grief and despair.

A couple of years passed and the chief fell in love with a shrewd widow of his village yearned to marry. This woman devised a wicked plan. She gave a condition to the chief that she would marry him only if he send off or kill the elder daughter. The chief's passionate love and the urge to marry her was too strong that he spent a lot of sleepless nights. Finally, he struck upon a plan to send off his elder daughter.

The father took the daughter to a forest and when she was completely tired he led her into a deep trench and made her sleep there. When she had slept, he covered the trench with a stone slab and returned home.

The younger daughter pressed upon her father of her sister's fate. As she did not get a response from her father she smelt a rat and followed trail of the footsteps of her father and her sister. After searching for a long time she found her in the deep drench. She then rescued her. They made plan to flee from her father into wilderness and they traveled many days until they reached a village. They asked for shelter but they were refused by every household. They came to a knoll on the outskirts of the village. They settled there and lived on water and forest herbs and berries.

One night, *Lichaba* appeared in disguise of a beggar in the village to test the villagers. Only the sisters accepted him and gave him food in their capacity. *Lichaba* blessed them with promise of plentiful harvest. That year their harvest was in abundance, big granaries were filled, and they became rich.

After some time, the elder sister got married to a rich man from the village. In the midst of their prosperity they remembered their father who by that time had sunken into dire poverty with the wicked woman.

The richness of the sisters reached their father's ears. Then he decided to visit them not as a father but like a beggar. The next day, the father and his wife set off for the village where the two sisters lived. When they came upon their house, they were welcomed with filial affection and were given a feast for the reunion.

The next day, they were sent back with lots of food but with a condition that they should be able to escape the chase of dogs. They were given one pack each to feed the dogs so that they would have time to escape. The pack of the father contained bones and that of the stepmother

meat. The secret of the contents was not disclosed to them. When they started off the dogs chased them in different directions. They opened their packs and started feeding the dogs. The father feed the dogs with the bones while the stepmother feed the dogs with the meat. As dogs normally take time to chew bones, the father had enough time to escape and reached home safely. For the stepmother, the meat she gave to the dogs was savored in no time that she fell prey upon the dogs.

The daughters got their father to their home and gave a good position. The younger daughter also got married to a *Nokinketer*. Then they lived happily ever after.

5. *Lijaba* and the Two Sisters.

Once upon a time there lived two sisters in the outskirts of an Ao village. They lived in a small hut. They were very poor that their food was substantiated with berries and fruits plucked from the forest.

One day, *Lijaba* appeared in that village. As of the belief of the Aos, *Lijaba* visited each and every village every year in order to bless them, but he did this in disguised form. This time, he appeared in the form of a poor beggar. He went knocking at every door for a night's rest, but everybody rejected him because he was poor and unattractive. Everyone in the village refused to give him shelter making different excuses. At last *Lijaba* reached the little house in the outskirts of the village and said, "May I come in to stay with you tonight?" The two sisters replied, "We have nothing to offer you at home and so we are ashamed to welcome you to let you in".

Lijaba responded, "Your grandfather has everything you want. Don't worry. I will come and sup with you tonight. The two sisters welcomed him in.

That night at the time of the supper, *Lijaba* sat near the oven and began to cook. He took out a grain of rice from his head and put it into the pot and the pot got filled with cooked rice. Likewise he scratched his legs and put something into the pot, which got filled with cooked pork. After the meal, they sat outside the hut and *Lijaba*, pointing at the fields of the villagers began to ask the sisters, "Whose field is that? And whose is that?" At last he pointed at a little field and asked, "Whose field is that?" The elder sister was felt shy to tell that it belonged to them because the field was too small. It was the smallest of all the fields in the vicinity. It was so small that it could be covered with a mat. The younger one disclosed that the field was theirs. On hearing this, *Lijaba* blessed the field.

The two sisters harvested the field and to their surprise, their house was filled with the paddy. Later on when the villagers saw what had happened, they realized that it was *Lijaba* who had visited them that day. But it was too late for them.

GLOSSARY

Arju: An Ao traditional institution. It is a male dormitory that impart a complex whole of knowledge - belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities, habits and manners expected of an Ao man as a member of society.

Jungli: One of the two major phartries of the Ao tribe. This is different from clan; clan being an origination of the phartry.

Jungli dialect: This is one of the two major dialects of the Ao tribe. Originally belonging to the Ao *Jungli* phartry of, it is used as the common dialect the Ao tribe. This dialect is used dominantly for articulation in writing and speaking.

Lichaba: One of the Gods of Ao ancestral belief at the apex of all powers. He is believed to be the creator of the world. He is believed to intervene in the world in the act of bountiful blessings to the righteous needy people.

Mongsen: One of the two major phartries of the Ao tribe.

Mongsen language: This is one of the one of the two major languages of the Ao community. This language is spoken by the Ao *Mongsen* phartry. The AOs, since ancestral times employ this dialect for folk songs for its aesthetic and literary attributes.

Sungskong: A hollow drum chiseled out of log: approximately fifteen feet in length and ten feet in circumference. It is used as signal for assemblies of the village folks and during emergencies as enemies' attack and fire. The different signals are identified through different beat of the drum.

Tarmunger otsu: *Tarmunger* literally means pre-historic era of the AOs and *otsu* means tale or tales. The term has two connotations. First, it entails stories narrated by the pre-historic AOs and secondly it means story relating to the pre-historic AOs.

Tongpang: A kind of earring worn by Ao womenfolk. It is made up of semi-precious stone, which is rectangular in shape and about ten square centimeters.

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