

**RE-IMAGINING THE AO-NAGA IDENTITY IN THE WORKS
OF TEMSULA AO**

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TEMSULA AO**

BY

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Submitted

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Re-Imagining the Ao-Naga Identity in the works of Temsula Ao” written by Lalbiakdiki for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis incorporates the student’s bonafide research and that these have not been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other University or Institute of learning.

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DECLARATION

I, Lalbiakdiki, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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Date:

Place: Aizawl, Mizoram

(LALBIAKDIKI)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

India is a nation with immense cultural diversity with each social group having its own culture and identity. Northeast India is known for its cultural heterogeneity and a diversity of outlook. It is inhabited mostly by tribal people wherein the diversity exists even within the tribal groups or sub-tribe. The region offers diverse ethnic and linguistic variations characterised by rich flora and fauna. The Northeast India comprises of eight states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The Ao-Naga tribe, on which the study of this thesis is conducted is one the major tribes of Nagaland. The Ao-Naga society has encountered various factors that shape the Ao-Naga identity today. The study in this chapter will throw light on the history of Nagaland with special reference to the tradition and culture that are distinct to the Ao-Naga tribe.

Nagaland is a hilly state in the Northeast of India which borders the state of Assam to the west, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam to the north, Myanmar to the east, and Manipur to the south. The capital of Nagaland is Kohima and the largest city is Dimapur. According to 2011 Census of India, Nagaland has an area of 16,579 square kilometres and a population of 1,980,602. Nagaland attained its statehood on 1st December 1963 and became the 16th state of India. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people and the basic source of economic activity. The main products incorporate rice, corn, pulses, millets, oilseeds, tobacco, sugarcane and potatoes. Nagaland has witnessed cultural and traditional transition moulded by religion, education, socio-political and economic transitions. However, the problem for its underground movement for secession from India since the 1950s still remains unresolved till today, with the problem compounded by internal factionalism since 1980s.

The tribes residing in Nagaland and within its surrounding area in the Northeast are known as Nagas. The word Naga originated as an exonym meaning an external name for a geographical place, a group of people, an individual person, or a

language or dialect. The name had not been in use earlier as most Naga villages were independent of one another in different locations. It was the frequent reference made by the British colonizers for the people in these areas and that the term came to be adopted eventually. Balmiki Prasad Singh in his “Foreword” to B.B. Kumar’s *Naga Identity* (2005) mentions how the Naga identity formation is a recent phenomenon. He writes, “Many tribes who call themselves Naga today, were unaware of the term . . . the term ‘Naga’ was a fluid one. It was a loose term. The Naga identity continues to be an evolving identity” (Kumar 11). B.B. Kumar adds, “Naga is a generic term used for about thirty tribes inhabiting the North-Eastern fringe and across our border in Myanmar” (15).

There are different variations of definition of the term ‘Naga.’ S.H.M Rizvi and Shibani Roy’s *Naga Tribes of North East India* (2006) states that the term Naga is derived from the Assamese word ‘noga’ which was used by the plains people for referring to the hill tribes. Similarly, according to J.H. Hutton, it is derived from the Assamese word ‘nanga’ (Hutton 5). It has also been claimed that the term was derived from the Bengali word ‘nanga’ meaning ‘naked’ which was used to refer the hill tribes with minimal clothing. Hence we may say that the word ‘naga’ signifies the ‘naked people’. Interestingly this has stark resemblance to the description made by Cladius Ptolemy, the Greek scholar in his *Geographia* where he mentioned the word ‘nagalagoi’ which means the realm of the naked people (*Nagaland GK*). Plotemy visited India during the second century A.D and his work dated around 150 A.D. There may also be a connection drawn to the word ‘nok’ which means people or folk in a few Tibeto-Burman languages (Verrier 22). There are also views that the term originated from the Thai word ‘nagari’ and Burmese word ‘nagka’ or ‘naka’, meaning people with earrings or pierced earlobes as both Naga men and women pierced their ears. Naga is also a Sanskrit word which means serpent. In Indian mythology, the Sanskrit word naga meant a member of a semi-divine race, part human, part cobra in form, associated with water and sometimes with mystical powers. However, it is unlikely that the Sanskrit word naga may have been associated with the definition of the tribe.

The Nagas belong to the Mongoloid and Indo-Burmese race. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The Nagas are heterogeneous tribes having common origin, and similar aspirations and cultural patterns. Prof. B.S. Chauhan points out that the outside world perceived the ancient Nagas “as head hunters, warriors and adventurers, stronger social bonding and ethnic lifestyle, as proud people with life centring around family and village, as honest, simple, intelligent courageous and hard working people, as social competitors” (1). The Nagas are known to have deep clan affinities towards one another. Members of the clan share the same norms and mores which hold them together almost like a giant family. The Nagas are perceived to be honest, simple and hard working, however they are also known to practise headhunting and preserve the heads of enemies as trophies through the 19th century and as late as 1969. During those times, headhunting was considered as a symbol of courage and a trophy signifying victory in a battle. It is for such reasons that many anthropologists have documented the Nagas as primitive, aggressive, violent and barbaric. R.G. Woodthorpe writes that the Nagas are “bloodthirsty, treacherous and revengeful” (67). These unique characteristics make Nagas a distinctly different group of people.

According to Rizvi and Roy in *Naga Tribes of North East India* (2006), Nagaland is inhabited by sixteen major tribes as well as a number of sub-tribes (1). Each tribe is unique in character with its own distinct customs, language and dress. The 1971 Census shows figures of sixteen Naga sub-tribes as well. They were: (i) Angami, (ii) Ao, (iii) Chakhesang, (iv) Chang, (v) Chirri, (vi) Khiemnungan, (vii) Konyak, (viii) Lotha, (ix) Makware, (x) Phom, (xi) Rengma, (xii) Sangtam, (xiii) Sema, (xiv) Tikhir, (xv) Yimchungre, and (xvi) Zeliang (*Census of India, 1971*). Pochury Naga was added subsequently in the 1991 Census. However, no population of Makware had been recorded in the 2001 Census. Instead a separate group under the category ‘Naga’ and ‘Unclassified Nagas’ had been added other than the seventeen Naga sub-tribes. Nungshimangyang Longchar, a farmer from Sungratsu village, comments in an interview, “There are sixteen Naga tribes in what is now Nagaland and Ao is one of them.” (Miri and Karilemla 14) As per the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, the Government of Nagaland in 2009, the

State recognised 14 Naga Tribes in Nagaland State viz. Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamningam, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Yimchungru, Zeliang. Although the term Naga includes various tribes inhabiting not only Nagaland, but also the neighbouring regions of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar, the study enlists only the Naga tribes who are residing in Nagaland. Today, Nagaland has twelve districts viz. Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Mon, Wokha, Zunheboto, Phek, Dimapur, Peren, Longleng, Kiphire and Noklak.

Being one of the major tribes of Nagaland the Ao-Naga tribe has its own cultural and traditional characteristics. Like all the other Naga tribes, the Ao-Nagas too have witnessed social transformation from their old tradition to the modern times caused by outside as well as internal factors. In order to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity today, the study will analyze the tradition and culture that are distinct to the Ao-Naga tribe based on the works of Temsula Ao and other relevant works on the Ao-Naga tribe.

As mentioned earlier, each Naga tribe has a language of their own. The Aos too have a distinct language called the Ao language. According to Mills, there are three distinct dialects in the Ao language, Chungli, Mongsen and Chanki. Among these, Chungli Ao and Mongsen Ao are spoken among majority of the Ao-Naga people, whereas Chanki is only spoken by a few. Chanki is spoken only in three villages. These Ao languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and falls under the branch of the Sino-Tibetan languages. Majority of the Ao-Nagas resided in the Mokokchung district of Nagaland where Mongsen Ao is spoken. However, Chungli is the most widely-spoken language and the prestige language of the Ao languages mainly due to the influence of the missionaries who first settled in a Chungli spoken region.

As one of the largest tribes of the Nagas, the Ao-Nagas occupy a long stretch of unbroken hills in the northern part of Nagaland. Their identities are reflected through their customs, beliefs, skills, language, ritual, architecture of homes, music, dance and handicrafts which has been handed down through generations in the form

of oral tradition and material culture. Since there is no written document to look back to, their origin can only be traced to Lungterok situated at Chungliyimti on the south bank of the river Dikhu. It is believed that their population grew rapidly while at Chungliyimti and the people had to search for more fertile lands. Their migration trail crossed the Dikhu River and then spread all over the five ranges of the present Mokokchung district. R. Bendangtemjen points out that “by 2001, there were as many as 102 Ao villages in Mokokchung” (147). Today, as per the 2011 census, there are 12 districts in Nagaland and the central Mokokchung district is occupied by almost 227,000 Ao-Nagas and also a few residing in the neighbouring state of Assam. It is for this reason that Mokokchung is often referred as the home of the Ao-Naga tribe. The Ao people derived their tribe name ‘Ao’ because they were constantly moving ahead leaving others behind. The word ‘Ao’ or ‘Aor’ means going or gone. Robin Temsu, a historian from Kohima referred to the Aos as ‘gone ahead’ as the Aos were the first settlers in the land, Temsula Ao defined them as “those that went away” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 17).

The study of the thesis is based on the Ao-Naga tribe, which is one of the major tribes of Nagaland. However, the term ‘Ao-Naga’ will sometimes be used interchangeably with the term ‘Naga’ to represent the collective tribes of Nagaland within the course of the study. The Ao-Nagas have a rich cultural heritage wherein the oral tradition plays an all-important role in defining good citizenship and maintenance of a harmonious social fabric. Their rich oral traditions had been passed on from generation to generation prior to them having a script. Oral tradition continues to remain an important component of their culture today.

Oral tradition is a form of human communication where in knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another. The transmission is through speech or song and may include folktales, ballads, chants, prose or verses. According to N.Scott Momaday, “The oral tradition is that process by which the myths, legends, tales and the lore of the people are formulated, communicated and preserved in language by word of mouth, as opposed to writing. Or. It is a collection of such things” (167). Thus oral tradition

holds as a storehouse of information, memories and knowledge held in common by a group of people, over many generations. However, oral traditions face the challenge of accurate transmission and verifiability of the accurate version, particularly when the culture lacks written language or has limited access to writing tools. This has also been the case for the Ao-Nagas. Storytelling and folktales have been an integral part of Naga society and only in the recent past have these oral narratives been rendered into written form.

The Ao-Nagas claimed to have a written script in their first established village called Chungliyimti. The script was written on the hide of an animal and was hung on a wall. Unfortunately a dog dragged it down and ate it while the villagers were away in their fields. From that time onwards, the people had to commit all knowledge to memory and began transmitting the same by word of mouth to succeeding generations. Guru Sademmeren Longkumer, a retired school teacher from Ungma village recalls:

We did have a script. During Ongputu (the Ong Era), it is said, the Aos had a written script and they preserved the script on an animal hide. One day, a dog snatched the hide which was hung on the wall and ate it. That is how the Aos lost their script (Miri and Karilemla 14).

In order to ensure that knowledge was passed on accurately, the Nagas established the *Morung*, which is the male dormitory, an institution where all young males were trained to inherit all knowledge of their tribe. J.P. Mills noted, “A *Morung* is a microcosm of the village and has its own council, reminding one strongly again of a public school with its prefects” (180). The practices in the *Morung* might have differed from tribe to tribe. They are the life and force of the village. An ill-kept *Morung* meant a weak village whereas a well-kept *Morung* signified a strong prosperous village. A village is often known by its *Morung*. In the Naga society, different tribes have different names for the *Morung*. Angamis called it *Kichuki*, Aos *Arju*, Lothas *Campo*, Semas *Apuki*, and so on. *Arju* was the most ancient institute of the Aos which existed since the Chungliyimti times. The word itself is written differently by writers in their respective works, for instance,

L.Sosang Jamir uses ‘Arichu’, Dr. Bengjongkumba uses ‘Ariju’ wherein Temsual Ao uses ‘Arju.’ All these words convey the same meaning but the spelling *Arju* as used by Temsula Ao will be used in this thesis. This has also been the case for several other words such as *Longtrok/Longterok/Lungterok*, *Chungleyimti/Chungliyimti*, *Jungli/Chungle/Chungli*, *Longjakrep/Longchakrep* etc. In studying the Ao-Naga culture, one may note the many variations in the spellings of these Ao words and terms because as mentioned earlier, all narratives were orally passed down from generation to generation. It was only in recent years that these traditions were documented using Roman script, and hence writers pen down these words apparently as closest to the way it is pronounced. However, for uniformity, the spellings used by Temsula Ao in her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) will be followed in this thesis.

In the *Ao-Naga Dictionary* (1911) written by Rev. Dr. E.W. Clark, we read how *Arju* serves as an institute of discipline, a place to learn the art of warfare and hunting, a training ground in matters of economy and administration. Sleeping at the *Arju* was compulsory for all boys who had reached adolescence, and for unmarried male adults. This tradition of *Arju* shows that the community took keen interest to mould its young people in all spheres of life to make them ideal members of the community and also served as a great medium to pass on their oral tradition to the younger generations. Here they learn different occupation and craftsmanship, how to handle and use various tools. For instance, one of the indispensable items of the Ao men is the *dao*. It is used as a weapon during warfare and also for chopping, clearing jungles etc., and for domestic work as well. The *dao* is called *nok* in the Ao dialect and comes in different shapes and sizes.

Similar practices were also maintained for adolescent girls where they learned handicrafts, social etiquette and various songs and chants. This does not exist for all the tribal communities but the Aos had an informal institution called *Tsuki* (Zuki), the house of an old widowed woman. Unlike the *Arju* where the men folks spent their nights, here at the *Tsuki*, the girls gathered in the evening to interact with the elders and friends. Thus the *Tsuki* functions for the same purpose of passing

down the knowledge of their tribe among the girls. It may be noted that the fact that *Tsuki* was practiced among the Aos and not always by other Naga tribal communities show that there was a semblance of comparative gender equality among the Ao-Nagas during that time.

The core belief of their origin in Ao folklore is one that maintains the belief that the ancestors of the Aos emerged out of the earth at ‘Lungterok’, which means six stones. Temsula Ao writes in her poem, “Stone-People from Lungterok” from her collection of poems *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013),

LUNGTEROK

The six Stones
Where the progenitors
And forebears
Of the stone-people
Were Born
Out of the womb
Of the earth.

...

STONE-PEOPLE

Savage and sage
Who sprang out of LUNGTEROK
Was the birth adult when the stone broke?
Or are the STONE-PEOPLE yet to come of age? (109)

According to tradition, three males and three females burst out of these six stones which were believed to be the starting of the civilization of the Ao-Nagas. This has been considered as the origin of the Aos by majority of the tribe including writers like Temsula Ao and L. Sosang Jamir. The three male stones were *Longpok*, *Tongpok* and *Longjakrep*, and the three female stones were *Longkakupokla*, *Yongmenala* and *Elongsu* who married the three males and settled in the first Ao settlement in Chungliyimti. B.B. Gosh the author of *Nagaland District Gazetteers: Mokokchung District* (1979) writes, “It was here that the Aos attained a remarkable

achievement as an organised society, a tribe with proper village government, distribution of powers, a set of customary law to abide by, and consciousness of moral and ethical aspects of mankind” (32). It is impossible to trace down exactly when the Ao-Nagas first settled in Chungliyimti because there was no written record of any sort of time or date. Their history can only be traced to the origin myth of Lungterok. However, the myth of the Lungterok serves as the ultimate ethos of the Ao-Nagas, and the beginning of their Ao tradition. Temsula Ao called this strain of tradition as the Primary Tradition.

In her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), Temsula Ao classifies the oral tradition belonging to three strains, Primary (tribe), Secondary (village) and Tertiary (clans). No account of the oral tradition would be complete without the reference to the Primary Tradition. Temsula Ao writes,

Over the centuries, what has been of paramount consideration of the tellers of this tradition is that the Primary Tradition must be preserved in its pristine purity and accuracy. No variation in this is acceptable by the people. The other two traditions, to be considered valid (or true) must be able to prove their connectedness to the primary one, For example, the migration legends of the two strains must have their beginnings in the tradition of Lungterok (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 13).

As time passed, a new lore emerged gradually which embodied the establishment of a particular village consisting of different clans where the first to arrive at a particular site could claim greater land holdings, seniority and prominence in the village government etc. The new lore incorporated inter-village relationships which were termed as the Secondary Tradition. The experiences of the villages during the Naga struggle for Independence may also be drawn within this tradition. Temsula Ao writes, “We see that this particular strain of the oral tradition is the most dynamic as it absorbs new data and new experience shared by a particular village” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 11). It is at this strain that the Aos engage in inter-village trade, collecting taxes, exchanging of folktales and folklores and even raiding of a

neighbouring village or tribe which resulted in composing new warrior songs. The practice of headhunting may also fall under this strain.

The third strain of the oral tradition is termed the Tertiary Tradition which deals with the lore of a particular clan. According to the legend of Lungterok, there are three distinct clans among the Ao-Nagas, they are *Pongener*, *Longkumer* and *Jamir*. It is believed that the three men who emerged out of Lungterok belonged to three distinct clans, and as such, even today, all the sub-clans of Aos derived their origin to either one of these main clans. As clan distinction is very important in the Ao social life, this strain traces the clan genealogy, its special achievements and distinctions. Upon the above observations, we can understand how well-knit the Ao society is, and how they maintain an exclusive clan identity while being connected with other clans within their tribe.

These three strains of traditions, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary form the rich oral tradition of the Ao-Naga tribe. Temsula Ao states that, “Oral Tradition of the people became the guiding force to remind, re-energise and re-enforce the people’s sense of themselves through succeeding generation.” (Ao, *On Being* 3) The highest compliment that can be paid to a person within the tribe is ‘O tashi’ meaning one who knows many words. The *O tashis* were the treasure house of their tribal history as well as their oral tradition.

Apart from the *O tashis*, the Ao-Naga names serves as the core element in the preservation of the oral tradition. The Aos treat nomenclature with utter seriousness because “in the Ao language, names of persons, clans and even of places are an integral aspect of oral tradition which in turn embodies everything related to the traditional Ao way of life” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 16). Ao names are exclusive to their own clans and there can never be duplication unless the bearer is dead. With the increase in population, new names were invented based on the history of their clan. Personal achievements and excellence in bravery were recognised in the names of the new generation. On the other hand, names of thieves, murderers, inappropriate characters and people who met unnatural death were generally abandoned. Here, we may note that the nomenclature serves as a crucial method of documenting family

and clan history, personal achievements and clan accomplishments which is an important element in the oral tradition.

Traditional society of the Aos has always been democratic in its structure. As mentioned above, the *Arju* and oral tradition plays an important role in maintaining a close-knit and well organized society. Each Ao village is independent within its jurisdiction and is governed by a ruling body called *Putu Menden* (Chungli language) or *Samen Menchen* (Mongsen language). The governing body is formed by representatives of each foundling clan in the village called *Tatars*. They hold the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the village. One thing notable of the Ao-Naga society is that it is a casteless society. Every villager has equal fundamental rights, whether rich or poor. Every Ao man has the right to hold any position as long as he is qualified and capable. The Ao-Nagas have specific customs and practices. They are very particular in meting out the societal norms and mores, some of which will be discussed below. Although some of these customs and practices were lost in due course of time, many are still followed and kept sacred till today.

The Ao-Nagas believed in equality of the sexes, however the status of women slowly got downgraded over time. In *Ao Naga World-view: A Dialogue* (2015), Arenjenba Ozukum recalls that, even from the ancient times, “women laughed in a different tune called *montijilaklak* and men laughed in the *pangsemsemsem* tune” (115), it was from then that women were considered inferior because they were smaller in size, confined within the household and were deprived of the privileges of *Arju*. However, this division of labour may have been practiced at first not for the sole purpose of discrimination but because men were physically more able than women. Like most societies in the world, the Naga society is also patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy provides secure environment, however it also prevents women from enjoying the same privileges as the men folk. According to Ao customary law, women were not allowed to participate in any decision-making bodies or in any village administration. She is debarred from performing religious rites and sacrifices and cannot inherit anything no matter how rich her parents were. L. Sosang Jamir points out that once a woman is married, she has to assume her husband’s status

throughout her life. Furthermore, she cannot perform religious rites and sacrifices nor is she entitled to earn honour, title or fame in spite of her good performance.

However women also played an important role in maintaining their tribal identity through various roles, say for example weaving. They excel in dying of yarn and weaving of cloth. Each village has a distinctive design of clothes which remains unchanged even today. The traditional design of the Aos is woven mainly in red, black, white and indigo. The most distinctive of their design is the Ao *Tsungkotepsu* or *Mangkotepsu* which is the black and red shawl with a white strip in the middle which depicts the valour and prosperity of the wearer. Even today, the shawl has been a proud badge and symbolic identity of the Ao tribe. It may be noted that the *tsungkotepsu* shawls are worn by Ao men-folks only. Apart from weaving, the Ao women excelled in pottery as well but the most noteworthy craft of the women folk in the olden days was the custom of tattooing the face, arms and legs which took them as many as five years to complete. According to Temsula Ao, tattooing of face, arms and legs of its womenfolk serves two purposes, utility and ornamentation. As an art it was an elaborate process of ornamentation, and on the utility aspect it marked the coming-of-age rituals in a girl's life. There were three distinct schools of designs in terms of design, Chungli, Mongsen and Changki. In the absence of written form, tattooing of women served as an important tool in preserving the oral traditions of the Ao-Nagas as it serves as a means of documenting their rich culture. However, this practice of tattooing was not advocated by the Christian missionaries and has become a taboo in today's context.

Sociologists assumed the *Naga* traditional religion as *animism*, the belief that objects, places and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "*Animism* is the belief in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests." Animistic beliefs were first competently surveyed by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his work *Primitive Culture* (1871). Before the advent of Christianity, the Aos believed and worshipped different gods. The word for god or deity is *Tsungrem*. Of the numerous gods, *Anungtsungba Tsungrem* (god of the sky), *Meyutsungba Tsungrem*

(god of judgement) and *Lijaba Tsungrem* (creator god) were regarded as the most powerful, they each ruled the sky, land of the dead and earth respectively. Animal sacrifice was common ritual among the Ao-Nagas. They were worshipped with the sacrifice of eggs, cockerel, dog, pig and even cows.

Rituals are an important part of the Ao cultural and religious life and they maintain strict standards of purity in terms of their conduct. They must be performed with meticulous correctness because each ritual is connected with crucial events of human life having a special status. One of the most fascinating concepts in traditional Ao thought is the concept of *tiya*. Every person inherits a *tiya* which determines the fate of that person. *Tiya* is internal to that person and it shapes the person's general demeanour in life. *Tiya* is each given to them by the god whom they call *Sobatiyaba Tsungrem* (god of destiny). It may be noted that the Ao-Naga religion was not a moral code but a system of ceremonies and rites to appease the spirit which sought to harm the people.

The Ao-Nagas had a concept of the soul which they call *tanula*. They believed that a man has six souls and a woman five, "of these the principal soul is the one which sustains the life force in the person. When this soul departs from the body, then the person dies" (Miri and Karilemla 91). Like the modern Christianity version of heaven and hell, they believed that the truthful ones go to *Myutsungba* (god of justice) and untruthful ones go to *sangsunu* which was filled with thick prickly bushes. One may observe that in religion, ethics or philosophy, 'good and evil' has always been a common dichotomy. Morality in the form of good and evil, for the Ao-Nagas the truthful and untruthful, is common to all human cultures worldwide. The Ao-Nagas did not bury their dead immediately, but placed them on high raised platforms in the front room of the living house. They observed a mourning period of six days for men and five days for women. However with the advent of Christianity it has been reduced to three days for both men and women. However, if a person died of unnatural death, the body would be buried right away.

The Ao-Nagas believed in *asuyim* i.e. the land of the dead, and that when a person died, his old form was still retained after the soul travels to the land of the

dead. They know this through the *sangmongtsu/arasentsur* (female soothsayer), *ratsunlar* (soothsayer in Mongsen dialect), whom they consider as the mediator between the dead and the living. The Ao myth about the land of the dead parallels other myths of the world where the dead person has to cross a certain river called *Longritsu* (stream of bitterness) and the transformation is completed from earthly shape to ethereal form.

From what we can glean from the above, it is obvious that the Ao-Nagas had a well-structured framework for their beliefs, rituals and traditions. This is often the case for communities or groups in order to maintain established status and hegemonies. There are many more customs and practices other than the ones mentioned above, which shall be mentioned in the following chapters of this work as required. The well-structured framework has given them an identity, an identity which is fuelled with patriotic sentiment because it is a self-created identity which can all be traced back to the founding myth of the Lungterok. Each member of the tribe has a role within their community, and the community functions in such a way that every member is inclusive of that role thereby becoming an independent self sustained community.

Before the arrival of the British, every village was independent and was administered by a group of experienced village elders. The first foreign encounter dated back to the year 1846 when the British Government assigned its units to survey the Naga Hills. The initial encounters from the outside force were received with much resistance leading to several battles between the British troops and the Nagas. According to L. Sosang Jamir in *Ao Naga Customary Laws and Practices* (2012), the battle of Khonoma was fought on 22nd November, 1897 which was the last and final resistance of the Nagas to the British invasion. This resulted in the establishment of the British Rule in 1880 in the Naga Hills. In 1886, A.W. Davis became the first Sub-Divisional Officer of Mokokchung. In April 1889, the Ao tribe was formally annexed to the British Empire. Under the British rule, village authority was eventually curtailed and restricted.

It was in the course of the above invasions that the Nagas were introduced to a new and foreign belief system. With the advent of Christianity along with Dr. E.W. Clark in the year 1872, the Aos had abandoned most of the animistic practices since most of them were converted to Christianity and the concept of *Myutsungba* was replaced by the concept of New Jerusalem i.e. heaven. However, many practices have become part of their culture, and hence while rejecting the animism, they have retained some practices of their culture too. Thus, the modern Ao culture has become a blend of the old Ao animism and the new Christianity. They have even composed a song about this transition:

Oh! In the beautiful Ao land.

Oh! The Christian religion has replaced the bad Lijaba religion

Oh! The pioneers of the former religion were threatened and tortured

Oh! God of sky and earth, you have engulfed the land

Oh! Let the Ao churches produce truthful leaders and peace maker.

Oh! Israel God let your likeness be born.

(Miri and Karilemla 108)

The advent of Christianity had its own drawbacks in Nagaland; however it also brought education. The first Mission School was opened at Molungyimsen in 1878. The Arju institution was slowly replaced by the mission schools. The villagers were initially reluctant to join the foreign education and it took them some time to adjust to the new system. Because the concept of the *Arju* was strongly instilled in them, the British first introduced local dormitories called 'Room' in every sector of the village where the students would report to every evening after their day's work. Gradually, the Arju and the Room system were replaced by the establishment of government schools. In 1884, the first printing press, called Molung Printing Press, was set up in Molungyimsen village. The same year, the Gospels of Matthew and John were translated into Ao language by Dr. E.W. Clark, the American missionary. During this time there were few written works about the Nagas which were mostly publications and anthropological writings by a few missionaries such as W.E Witter's *Grammar and Vocabulary* in Lotha (1888), the *Sema Primer* by Rev H. B. Dickson (1908) and E. W. Clark's *Dictionary* in the Ao language (1911). The Ao

Christian Literature Committee started in 1950 which focussed on translation of the Bible. With the work of the lead translator Nokdenlemba, assisted by Bendangwati, the Holy Bible in Ao language was dedicated for public use on 29th November 1964.

According to S.K. Chaube in *Hill Politics In Northeast India* (1999), in April 1945, the deputy commissioner of the Naga Hills District, C.R. Pawsey, established the Naga Hills District Tribal Council as a forum of various Naga groups in the districts replacing an earlier organization called Naga Club. In February 1946, it was further reorganized as a political organization called Naga National Council (NNC). The emergence of the Naga National Council (NNC) during the 1940's under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo campaigned for the secession of the Naga territory from India and creation for a sovereign Naga state. The founder vice-president of the NNC was Mayangnokcha Ao and the secretary, Imti Aliba Ao. The organization was split into two central councils, at Kohima and Mokokchung.

In the course of time, Nagaland became the hotbed for underground activities and was regarded as a politically disturbed area. "After the transfer of power in 1947, the Nagas, along with several frontier groups refused to join India and launched a resistance movement" (Bortoki 342). Temsula Ao writes, "the fifties and the sixties in the Naga Hills were a turbulent period and as a result of the events a new state known as Nagaland came into being in 1963" (Ao, *Once Upon* 180).

Survival took precedence over everything else, including education and literacy. It is true that the Christian missions and the force of the colonial state were the primary agents of the transformation. In the course of time, Naga writers gradually emerged after a more sizeable population were educated from 1970s onward. A Naga author, Tajenyuba Ao, made an appearance with his *A History of Anglo-Naga Affairs* in 1958. Most of the "travelogues" by British officials and anthropologists were also published in the 1960s. Four tabloid newspapers – namely, *Citizen's Voice*, *Nagaland Times*, *Ura Mail* and *Platform News* – were also published during this period.

Politics, (Naga) history and religion became the three dominant topics for early Naga writers. The obsession of Nagas for politics and history aligns with the independence movement for a free Naga country. Asoso Yonuo, a Naga writer writes in *The Rising Naga: A Historical and Political Study* (1974):

In 1879-80, the Nagas disastrously fought against the British a war of independence, inspired by their phantom of freedom. In this war, the Nagas were remorselessly throttled and their village-states were annexed into the British India, dividing them into Assam, Manipur and Burma and ruled with a gun in one hand and a cross in the other (xii).

Religion becomes an important element in the Naga society. Amidst extreme situations of violence and privations, the Nagas have often found an anchor in religion. By 2011, the census recorded 87.93% of the Naga population as Christians. In recent years, committed members of the Naga communities have come forward to probe into their own heritage as reflected through oral tradition. Temsula Ao (b.1945) is one such writer who delves into the different aspects of the Ao-Naga tradition and culture. As a poet, short story writer and ethnographer, like many of her predecessors, she has successfully described the experiences of her people. She talks about disposition, cultural fragmentation and post-colonial corruption. There is also a strong attempt to preserve the Ao-Naga identity and return to the Naga roots.

The Ao-Nagas have always maintained a close affinity with their traditions and customs, however, the changes brought by Christianity, colonialism and modernization have affected the social fabric of the Ao culture. The Aos, being a tribal society, have been struggling to decolonize their culture which the colonists had earlier discarded as nonsense, and which Bhabha had countered as “colonial nonsense” (175), as expressed in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). The Ao-Nagas have not all together lost their traditional identity nor have they discarded their past, but there is a synthesis of the old and new, somewhat similar to the ‘hybrid’ (159) class spoken of by Bhabha. The concept of hybridity from *The Location of Culture* explains how people’s identities are not limited to their ethnic heritage, but rather are subjected to change and modification through experience. Bhabha sees the

post-colonial cultures as hybrids of the people and the colonizers which challenges the binary opposition of the west and non-west. According to Bhabha, the concept of hybridity can be used as a strategic reversal of the process of domination by the other i.e. the colonizers. In a definition by Pramod K. Nayar, he says that “hybridity is a creation of new cultural forms and identities as a result of the colonial encounter . . . hybridity in post colonial societies can be in the form of a retrieval/revival of the pre-colonial past – such as folk or tribal cultural forms and conventions – or to adapt contemporary artistic and social productions to the present-day conditions of globalization, multiculturalism and transnationalism. A retrieval or revival can be seen as resistance to the colonial inheritance” (Nayar, *Postcolonial* 200). In the case of the Ao-Nagas, much of their cultural identity has been disfigured by the presence of the dominant power of the other. They have become a hybrid of the old which they could not fully discard and the new from which they resist to adopt all, this is the stage where the crossing over of time and cultural differences occurs and where new signs of identity are formed. As a result, there is an ultimate need to situate the Ao-Naga identity in the contemporary discourse.

From this perspective, the thesis shall attempt to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity in the works of Temsula Ao. Re-imagining here would mean “reinterpreting imaginatively” or “to imagine again or anew; especially to form a new conception of ” or “to re-create” (Merriam-Webster). The title of the thesis ‘Re-imagining The Ao-Naga Identity’ does not necessarily denote an existence of a fixed Ao-Naga identity but rather denotes an identity re-structured from a nebulous past as reflected in Temsula Ao’s poem, “Stone-people from Lungterok.”

In order to provide a theoretical framework for subsequent discussion on the core issue of identity in this thesis, let us delve into the origin of the word ‘identity’ and its semantic meaning and interpretations. The notion of identity has become an important component in the study of literary and cultural discourse. The issue of identity has been widely critiqued, opening up new space of study in academic and professional contexts. Studying identity in written discourse requires not just an understanding of textual features but the perceptions and experiences of identity both

by writers and readers. However, the comprehension of identity can be multiple and dynamic, varying with region and time.

Identity is derived from the Latin word *idem* and Late Latin *identitas* meaning same or the quality of being the same. This meaning was fairly accepted during the late 16th century. In the course of time, the term has been used to convey multiple meanings especially after Erik Erikson's work *Identity: Youth and Crisis* in 1968. 'One's personal characteristics, or the sense of who one is, as perceived by the person or by others,' is a meaning of identity that dates from the early 18th century (dictionary.com). Since then issues of personal identity, especially sexual and gender identity have provoked discussions about one's overlapping roles in society. According to Oxford Dictionary identity is defined as 'the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.' According to Richard Jenkins, identity "refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (Jenkins 4).

Identity plays a central role in defining the characteristic of not just an individual, but also social groups based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture etc. In this light, identity can be seen to have a double sense, personal or social. While personal identity is used to distinguish the characteristic of an individual, social identity refers to a social group marked by distinct characteristic features. There can be multiple identities which operate at personal and family level, gender, sex, class and clan, community, social, global, national, local levels. Similarly, according to social identity theory formulated in 1970s by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, identity can broadly be categorized as personal and social. Personal identity is the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual, social identity refers to the social relations with other individuals and groups. Social identity theory suggests that an organization can change individual behaviours if it can modify their self-identity or part of their self-concept that derives from the knowledge of, and emotional attachment to the group (Tajfel and Turner 16).

In 1973, the phrase 'identity politics' was coined that described a political approach on identity based on the cultural, ethnic, gender, class, race, religious,

sexuality or social background that characterize a group identity. Similar to the phrase ‘identity politics,’ Gary Herrigel stated that, “by social identity, I mean the desire for group distinction, dignity, and place within historically specific discourses (or frames of understanding) about the character, structure, and boundaries of the polity and the economy” (371). Francis M. Deng provided a similar definition in his book *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (1995) stating that, “Identity is used in this book to describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (1).

In a pragmatic sense the meaning of identity has many conventional elucidations. If we ask a person who or what he is, we are likely to receive specific answers of who that person is or what he does that reflects his personal identity, giving the actuality of who that person is. Michel Foucault rejects the view of a person having an inner and fixed essence that is personal identity. He identifies the self as being defined by a continuing discourse in a shifting communication of oneself to others. Since the attributes which affect an individual or social group vary over time, the idea of identity can be said to be socially constructed. Peter Katzenstein in his book *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (1996) explains how “the term [identity] (by convention) references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other” (59). Similar to the notions put forth by Foucault and Katzenstein, Stuart Hall asserts in his essay “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference” that,

Identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses. ... [Until recently, we have incorrectly thought that identity is] a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action ... the logic of something like a ‘true self.’ ... [But] Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself (Hall 6).

If indeed identity is socially constructed as analyzed by Foucault, Katzenstein and Hall, then the need to incorporate such social factors affecting the ‘self’ and marking the points of intersection based on race, ethnicity, religion, language or culture into the study of formation of identity becomes crucial. In the views of Aristotle, although it is universally accepted that man is a social animal, man is never satisfied with positioning himself at the peripheral zone institutionalized by superior groups or individuals (or the Other). It is but human nature to always push forward towards the centre or recognition. Hence, the problem on identity arises when one’s identity has been put on the periphery by the significant Other intimidating their dignity, pride, status, honour or self-respect.

In the light of the above discussion, one may say that the logic of identity is grounded in the understanding of oneself in relation to the elements of continuity provided by other structures or discourses. As Pramod K. Nayar puts it, “Identity is the consequence of representation and the effect of discourse” (Nayar, *An Introduction* 26). This makes identity a narrative of the self, constituted in part by representation within discourse. Cornel West in his article, “A Matter of Life and Death” describes that:

How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire and how you conceive of death: desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association. It’s the longing to belong, a deep, visceral need that most linguistically conscious animals who transact with an environment participate in. And then there is a profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety for ‘true’ self and the demands of modern organizational life. And so in talking about identity we have to begin to look at the various ways in which human beings have constructed their desire for recognition, association, and protection over time and in space and always under circumstances not of their own choosing (West 20).

This further opens up new arguments on decision - of accepting or rejecting identities. Charles Taylor in his book, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989) explains that,

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose (27).

According to Taylor's analysis, personal identity is based on the person's rationality, moral ideologies and objectives. This brings out the parallel notion of how identity is constructed and more so, how ideologies attribute to the construction of identities. According to Marxist philosophy, the term ideology denotes the attitudes, ideas, beliefs, values and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society. Dominant ideology often acts as a mechanism of social control, it frames how the majority of the population think about the nature of society, their place in society, and their connection to a social class (Bullock et al. 236). As reflected in *The German Ideology* theorised by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The ideas of the ruling class are, in any age, the ruling ideas," and that "the dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class" (Abercrombie et al. 29). Marxists focus on the manner in which societal institutions determine consciousness and, therefore, identity. Although in the views of Taylor, personal identity is based on ideologies or individual thoughts, they are also very much in relation to society and other individuals. Identity is not a single isolated entity to describe because every human being is part with the other in so many ways and do survive in a group. Personal identities are drawn from societies and society is shaped with individual identities.

According to Marxist theorist Louis Althusser in his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," he stresses on the crucial role of state institutions in the maintenance of dominant ideology. He identifies churches, schools, family, religion, media and other entities as Ideological State Apparatus. Contrast to the Ideological State Apparatus is the 'Repressive State Apparatus' which consist of the

armed forces or police, the government, the judiciary and the prison system. Ideological State Apparatus is often used by the dominant power to reproduce and transmit the mental production of the state. Hence, the Ideological State Apparatuses offer an important theoretical framework in identity formation of individuals in society.

Allison Wier in her article “Who are we? Modern identities between Taylor and Foucault” points out Charles Taylor and Michel Foucault who offer two very different descriptions and analysis of modern identities. She observes that, “Taylor is focusing on first-person, subjective, affirmed identity, and Foucault is focusing on third-person, or ascribed, category identity” (1) Instead of comparing these two as a separate concept, Wier suggests that we combine “Foucauldian power analysis with a Taylolean understanding of authenticity” in order to study identities of race, gender, class and sexual orientation in terms of critical relations with defining communities. Foucault’s power analysis is important because it denies the older notion of power being possessed by the few and elite. According to him, power is not possessed but exercised, as power relations are deeply unstable and changeable. Foucault further states that, “Where there is power, there is resistance,” (95) and resistance is often carried with violence as in the case of political unrest. Hence, the relation of power, resistance and violence contributed much in the construct or deconstruct of social identities.

Hommi Bhabha expresses in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) the concept of ‘hybridity.’ Hybridity simply means a cross between two separate races or cultures, a mixture of two separate entities. The concept of hybridity has been used in literary and cultural studies to designate identities generated through the intersections of two separate culture or social structures, as a result of which a hybrid identity is formed. Bhabha’s theory of hybridity is often employed in postcolonial literature from Asia and Africa where the colonial subjects hang between the influence of eastern and western culture. Hybridity holds the ‘in-between’ space between two different cultures which consists of the mixture of both the cultures. Within this hybrid space, cultures tend to witness disintegration since the influence of their

colonizer's language, dress, politics and cultural attitude slowly replaces their old culture, and is termed as mimicry in the postcolonial discourse.

Through the concept of hybridity, Bhabha explains how people's identities are not limited to their ethnic heritage, but rather are subjected to change and modification through experience. Bhabha sees the post-colonial cultures as hybrids of the people and the colonizers which challenge the binary opposition of the west and non-west. According to Bhabha, the concept of hybridity can be used as a strategic reversal of the process of domination by the other i.e. the colonizers. The formulation put forth by Bhabha is used as a theoretical framework in studying the formation of the Ao-Naga identity in this thesis. The Aos, being a tribal society, have been struggling to decolonize their culture which the colonists had earlier discarded as nonsense, and which Bhabha had countered as "colonial nonsense" (175). The Ao-Nagas have not all together lost their traditional identity nor have they discarded their past, but there is a synthesis of the old and new, somewhat similar to the 'hybrid' (159) class spoken of by Bhabha. Taking into consideration that identity is fluid and a social construct, and that it can be a hybrid of two entities, Balmiki Prasad Singh has rightly point out in his "Foreword" to B.B. Kumar's *Naga Identity* (2005) that, "The Naga identity continues to be an evolving identity" (Kumar 11). This notion of evolving identity implies the continuity of identity with time. The word 'evolving' shares both the concept put forth by Stuart Hall who said that "identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point" and Bhabha's concept on hybridity.

Continuity is an important constituent of identity, the failure of which eventually results in deterioration or extinction. All cultures and traditions change through time. They do not remain static. The changes and continuities of these traditions occur in every sphere of life which marks the identity of communities/tribes. Richard Jenkins in his book *Social Identity* says that, "Change, or its prospect, is particularly likely to provoke concerns about identity" (26) and that "change also reveals itself in the intimate details of individual lives, and the privacies of the person occupy a particular and important place in contemporary social science discourses about identity" (Jenkins 34). To take up the study of transition of any

culture, the approach challenges the constraints of nationality, race, gender or other group identities at any given time.

Stuart Hall in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” states that cultural identity is “not an essence but a positioning” (226). This simply means that cultural identity is not a fixed essence which is rooted in the past. In his essay, Hall defines two types of cultural identity, the first is a “shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ . . . which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (223). Hall gives his second definition as,

Cultural Identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power (225).

He further states that it is through this comprehension on cultural identity that one can properly understand the traumatic character of the colonial experience. The concept of “being” and “becoming” shares the idea of continuity and change shared by Richard Jenkins. Hence, identity is neither fixed in the past nor has come to a fixed position, rather it undergoes ‘constant transformation’ as Hall puts it. Under such constant transformation in a colonial influence, Pramod K. Nayar in his book *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (2008) explains how the process of hybridity can be, “a creation of new cultural forms and identities as a result of the colonial encounter” (200). As such, a new form cultural identity is often formed under such ‘colonial encounter,’ the stage where the crossing over of time and cultural differences occurs and where new signs of identity are formed. Nayar further writes, “hybridity in post colonial societies can be in the form of a retrieval/revival of the pre-colonial past – such as folk or tribal cultural forms and conventions – or to adapt contemporary artistic and social productions to the present-day conditions of

globalization, multiculturalism and transnationalism. A retrieval or revival can be seen as resistance to the colonial inheritance” (Nayar, *Postcolonial* 200).

‘Retrieval’ or ‘revival’ of the pre-colonial past which Nayar has spoken of is closely related to the possession of land. Possession of land is a crucial factor in order to situate the identity of any social group, failure of which leads to disintegration among the people and society, affecting the cultural and traditional homogeneity of the people. Baruram Swami talks about the relation of land and identity in his article “Quest for Ethnic Identity in the Short Stories of Temsula Ao’s ‘The Jungle Major’ and ‘The Last Song’ ”,

Ethnic identity in the concept of space has to do with property, self-possession and the politics of sovereignty. It is also realised in the possession of a sovereign land. Realising identity begins with claiming of land. Territorial land plays an important role in shaping cultural and ethnic identity. (Swami 3).

Jonathan Rutherford in his article “A Place called Home” describes ‘not belonging’ as “a sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally ‘out of touch’ with the world” (Rutherford 9). He explains that unless one is at peace with oneself, one cannot attain this feeling of ‘belongingness.’ He further says that, “Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised – this is home, this is belonging” (Rutherford 9). Homi Bhabha also uses the term “unhomely” which does not mean homelessness, “unhomely” refers to the displacement of the idea of home. Bhabha uses the term “to refer to the estranging sense of the relocation of the home in an unhallowed place” (Bhabha 143). Therefore, in relating to this notion of belongingness, the feeling of home marks an important factor. The realization of one’s identity begins with the realization of home. Unless one attains the feeling of belonging, a feeling of home, one cannot truly locate one’s identity.

Moreover, in the light of postcolonial studies, rediscovery of one’s one cultural identity is “grounded in the re-telling of the past” (qtd. in Hall, 224). Frantz

Fanon writes, “Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it” (as qtd. in Hall, 224). Therefore in order to create or re-create a new perspective of what their identity has become, rediscovering the production of identity is necessary in the postcolonial context. Hall has written that cultural identity “has its histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us... It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall 226).

The various formulations reflected above show a wide range of the notion of identity, from personal to social, ethnic and cultural identities, reflecting the multiple lineages which the word ‘identity’ has. The notion of ‘identity’ offers a complex meaning and its study has opened up a wide range of debatable topics and discourse in literature, politics or social studies. Nevertheless, these definitions refer to a common underlying concept which evokes a sense of recognition, one’s feelings about one’s self, character, goals and origins. In the world of literature, the study on identity helps to re-examine, introspect and re-imagine the various stages of construction of identities, so that readers may distinguish the style in which they are imagined into existence. On identity, Temsula Ao writes that “identity is a many-layered concept” (Ao, *Identity* 6). This is because of the multiple notion associated with the word ‘identity’ and also because Naga identity is moulded by various factors viz. colonial rule, Christianity, education, political issues, ideology, westernization, modernity and globalization etc., which call for the need to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity in the present context from a well-grounded standpoint.

The study of this thesis on re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity is based on both fiction and non-fiction works of Temsula Ao: *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006), *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009), *Books of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013), *Once Upon a Life: A Memoir* (2013), *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014) and *Aosenla’s Story* (2017). Out of the many Naga writers, the works of Temsula Ao have been selected

because her works have close affinity to the oral tradition, Ao-Naga culture and also captures the transition of Nagaland as it undergoes various changes in the course of its history. She is well known for her many writings on oral tradition, folk songs, myths and cultural traditions of the Ao-Naga. She has an entry in the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore and Folk Life on Folklore of Nagaland*, Vol. No. 2, published in Westport, Connecticut, U.S.A. She also published a book of literary criticism *Henry James' Quest for an Ideal Heroine* in 1989 from Writers Workshop.

Temsula Ao was born in 1945 at Jorhat, Assam. She was orphaned at an early age and her five siblings were split up. The younger two went to their native village, the elder two continued their studies in Jorhat, Assam and Temsula Ao was sent to Golaghat Mission Boarding School. She had a difficult childhood, followed by an early marriage and subsequently the responsibilities of being a single parent to four. This struggle in life is evident as later described in her memoir *Once Upon a Life: A Memoir*. She joined the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong in December 1975 as a Lecturer in the Department of English and retired in 2010 as a Professor. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 2007 by the Government of India, the Nagaland Governor's Award for Distinction in Literature in 2009 and Sahitya Akademi Award for her short story collection, *Laburnum for My Head: Stories* in 2013. She now resides in Dimapur, Nagaland.

Her first book is a collection of poem published in 1988 titled *Songs That Tell*. The poems of Temsula Ao are filled with elements of nature, faith, love, life, death, loneliness, desires and confessions from interesting perspectives writing from interesting perspectives such as that of a self-made woman and a tribal. *Songs that Tell* (1988) was followed by four other books of poems, namely, *Songs that Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003) and *Songs from the Other Life* (2007). In 2013, all five of her poetry books were compiled and published as *Books of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. In studying the poems of Temsula Ao, the study of this thesis will refer to the compiled collection of books of poems i.e. *Books of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013), and not the separate collection of poems mentioned above.

The poems of Temsula Ao are marked by the presence of nature either providing the backdrop, or is of historical significance like in the poem “Stone-People from Lungterok,” or playing an active role as seen in the short story “Laburnam for my Head” in the collection of short stories *Laburnam for my Head: Stories*. Her people are depicted as having a close relation with their immediate ecological surroundings and nature which is an integral part of their life. She makes excellent use of nature as metaphors. This aspect is prominent in the poetry emanating from the region as noted by Chandra:

Indian English poetry from North-eastern part of India is rich in enshrining various aspects of ecology of the region. It has been a fashion with the poets of the region to celebrate the ecological glory of the region and their ecological awareness (35).

According to Sikhamoni Gogoi, “in the male biased world women and nature are often constructed through value dualism in disjunctive pair of words – reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman – where the two words of each pair are seen as oppositional rather than complementary” (1). Here, the first word of each pair connotes to the male which is considered to be superior to the latter. While presenting a graphic picture of the Naga society, the writings of Temsula Ao also dwell on the strength and weaknesses of the characters in her stories and status of Naga women, her struggle with tradition and modernity, caught between the rural and the urban, thus reflective of social behaviour patterns. In her poem “Woman,” Temsula Ao writes:

But woman,
Thus fashioned
Thus oppressed
Beguiled and betrayed,
Sometimes rebelled
To break the mould
And shake off the hold
That nature devised

And man improvised.

(Ao, *Books of Songs* 17)

Temsula Ao also writes about the turmoil and the terror-stricken lives of the Naga people: “Nagaland’s story of the struggle for self-determination started with high idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment because it became the very thing it sought to overcome” (Ao, *These Hills* x). All were affected by the violation of human rights which was a common occurrence. Temsula Ao writes, “For the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life – their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul” (Ao, *Once Upon* 180).

Kishor Kumar comments, “Major strength of her poetry lies in two features: its rootedness and its political consciousness. Nagaland in her poetry is not just a setting; it is soul of her poems” (13). What Kumar comments on Temsula Ao may be evident as we read the following lines from her poem “My Hills”

Today.
 I no longer know my hills,
 The birdsong is gone,
 Replaced by staccato
 Of sophisticated weaponry

 Because
 The very essence
 Of my hills
 Are lost
 Forever ---
 (Ao, *Book of Songs* 158)

Though political conflicts affect *society* as a whole, women are the ones who bear the brunt of terror and domination, the terror of insurgency and living under

patriarchal society. Jo Freeman writes in “The Politics of Women’s Liberation” that “what was thought to be a personal problem has a social cause and political situation. . . Women learn to see how social structures and attitudes have moulded them from birth and limited their opportunities” (qtd. in Hooks 48-49). In spite of the various limitations and constraints from the society and of patriarchy, Temsula Ao always seem to have that boldness to express oneself as a woman,

I am a woman
 And woman creates
 Therefore
 I shall create
 The real me
 And a brave new world
 (Ao, *Books of Songs* 129)

Although Temsula Ao started her debut publication in the form of poetry in 1988, 1992 and 1995, it was in 1999 that she published her first non-fiction book on the oral tradition of her tribe. In *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), Temsula Ao presents the Ao-Naga people and their rich oral tradition throwing light on the Ao-Naga society, their belief system, myths and tales and the Ao-Naga language and how these have shaped their history. The book is the first of its kind in that it is written by an insider after colonial writings about the Nagas. In her preface to the book she mentions the necessity of preserving and documenting the history, culture and society’s mores in order to hold the fabric of the Ao-Naga society together for generations. In doing that, she adds, “Tradition is all about managing and nurturing the emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspirations of a society” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* ix). Temsula Ao had been a Fulbright fellow at the University of Minnesota where she was engaged with the American Indian Studies Department. It was her experience and exposure during that time which has motivated her to pen down the rich oral tradition of the Ao-Naga to written form.

These Hills Called Home: Stories From a War Zone published in 2006 consists of ten short stories which deals with the experience of the Naga people

caught in the web of violence and the cross-fire between the forces of the underground and the military. One is left with a graphic imagery of the scarring memories of the turbulent period of the violence. Temsula Ao wrote in her preface to this book which she has titled 'Lest We Forget':

These stories however, are not about 'historical facts'; nor are they about condemnation, justice or justification of the events which raged through the land like a wildfire half a century ago. On the contrary, what the stories are trying to say is that in such conflicts, there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms. For the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life – their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul (Ao, *These Hills* x).

The stories in *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* deal primarily with stories set in the period of Naga's struggle for independence. Most of the stories bare tragedy involving the unnecessary loss of good and innocence. The first story "The Jungle Major" is the story of Punaba who had joined the Naga underground militants and was saved from the Indian soldiers by the wit and presence of mind of his wife Khatila. "Soaba" is a story about a young boy Soaba who lost his life in the hands of Imlichuba, an example of how the innocent people became victims to the violence that prevailed during that time. "The Last Song" recounts a graphic scene of how two women were brutally raped by the Indian Army, killing more villagers and setting fire to the village. "The Curfew Man," "The Night," "Shadows" and "An Old Man Remembers" all revolve around violence and terror in the wake of Naga nationalist movement and the Indian Army. "The Pot Maker" highlights the intricate art of pot-making through the life of a skilled potter Arenla. "The Journey" captures the story of Tinula who struggles to receive formal education alongside his brother and "A New Chapter" highlights the politics of power struggle within the Naga society. The stories provide the crucial insight into the Naga society, their daily livelihood and social relations during that time, it also

unveils the face of violence in its various existences. Dr. Miazzi Hazam comments on these stories,

The dramatic nature of human tragedy being enacted before our eyes is unfurled as tale by tale we are conveyed a sense of loss involving the innocent. It is a tussle over power in which the common man is sandwiched and incapacitated. The restoration of the equilibrium which is a marked feature of tragedies is missing in their sufferings since many of these stories in these volumes leave an after-taste much like the one created by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* (1954). (24)

The short stories of Temsula Ao can be read as an expression of human life as in dual relationship: one in the societal relation while the other in relation to nature. *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* written in 2009 consists of eight short stories concentrating on the lives of people from diversified social groups such as women, illiterate women, servant boy, hunter and villagers. *Laburnum for my Head* deals more with the ordinary events of Naga life rather than the graphic violence seen in *These Hills Called Home*, nevertheless it does not mean that it is absent. Temsula Ao has a way of narrating stories that touch on humanistic issues. Of stories, she comments,

Stories live in every heart; some get told, many others remain unheard – stories about individual experiences made universal by imagination; stories that are jokes, and sometimes prayers; and those that are not always a figment of the mind but are, at times, confessions. (Ao, *Laburnum* “Epigraph”)

Temsula Ao dealt on recurring themes such as those relating to women’s identity in the context of patriarchy as in the story of Lentina in *Laburnum for my Head*, where the society disapproves of a woman asserting her own rights. All that Lentina wanted was to make herself immortal by having a laburnum bloom at her grave instead of a headstone. However, we also find men like Babu who supports a woman unconditionally in the quest of her identity. Such quest for identity is also found in “Three Women.” “Three Women” carries the hint of female suppression

and the hierarchical setup of the society. The idea of nothingness in womenfolk is also present in “A Simple Question” and “Sonny.” “The Boy Who Sold an Airfield” shows the profit-making transactions among human beings. “The Letter” shows the awareness of the young villagers to fight against oppression and extremism. “Death of a Hunter” tells us the story of a hunter who finally kills the hunter within him. In “Flight,” a caterpillar becomes an instrument to human amusement, to suit the purpose of a little boy. The story shows how humans lead their lives objectifying nature to suit their instrumental values.

Unlike the short stories where Temsula Ao had written about the lives of assorted Naga people, her memoir *Once Upon A Life: A Memoir*, published in 2013, touches upon the sincere and honest struggles of her life, the intense memory of her orphaned childhood and the experiences of motherhood. Her confessions begin with her “Early Childhood” till her “Evolution of a Writer” in the form of a bildungsroman. She describes her memoir as “an attempt to exorcise my own personal ghosts from a fractured childhood.” (Ao, *Once Upon* viii) Her story throws light on the incidences of life, mostly miserable experiences that help in moulding her as a writer. The element of self-reflection and retrospection is strongly seen in this memoir, which is also a unique trait in her other creative works as well. *Once Upon A Life: A Memoir* may also be viewed as the everyday Naga girl/woman trying to fit into the patriarchal set-up of the Naga society.

On Being a Naga: Essays (2014) contains ten essays which were written over a long span of time during her teaching career at NEHU, Shillong. Temsula Ao finds it a necessity for “a re-appraisal of Naga history and identity” (Ao, *On Being* ix). She fears that the younger generation have lost their true identity and culture. In the “Foreword” to *On Being a Naga: Essays*, Tilottoma Misra writes,

Temsula Ao’s present collection of essays show a deep concern for the cultural loss suffered by her people during the colonial period and after, and the urgent need to search for the historical roots which can define the ‘Naga identity’, not as perceived by ‘others’ but as viewed from inside the society... in her effort to rebuild her people’s self-confidence in their own culture and

tradition, Temsula Ao performs the role of a modern subject who is capable of critiquing her own culture with the positive intent of reforming, not destroying the whole structure (Ao, *On Being* xvi).

It is important to take into consideration the fact that Misra pointed out the urgency to define the Naga identity not as perceived by ‘others’ because almost all the current knowledge and literary discourse of the Naga history are found to be based on the observations of the colonial ethnographers and anthropologists of the twentieth century namely writers like W.G Archer (Additional Deputy Commissioner in the Naga Hills, 1946-1948), Henry Balfour (Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford 1893-1939), Ursula Graham Bower (Anthropologist in the Naga Hills 1937-1946), Christoph von Furer-Haimendor (Anthropologist in the Naga Hills, 1936-1937), J.H. Hutton (District Commissioner in the Naga Hills, 1909-1935) and J.P. Mills (District Commissioner in the Naga Hills, 1914-1948) among others. These writers studied the Naga history from the ethnographic and anthropological approach mainly for the sole purpose of comparative research, yet although these may prove significant in the study of the Naga Identity, they cannot compare to the cultural insights perceived by an insider.

On Being a Naga: Essays highlight the views of Temsula Ao not only as an Ao-Naga but also the Naga identity in general. The essays can be viewed as the author’s articulation of her thoughts on what it has meant to be a Naga in the past, and what makes the Naga today amidst various changes that the tribe has gone through. She writes in the “Introduction” to the book that, “the new generation is spearheading a movement for retrospection as well as introspection in the face of all that has gone wrong in the Naga society . . . Therefore, we have to review and re-define our identity with mature sensitivity and extreme caution in such a global juxtaposition” (Ao, *On Being* ix).

It is for these reasons that re-imagining of the Ao-Naga identity requires study, especially from the perspective of an insider, because minority cultures have often been wrongly portrayed and misrepresented in the colonial discourse. Writers like Temsula Ao serve as a counter-voice for such misconceptions, and this fact has

often been the case not only for the Northeast of India but for other parts of the world as well. For instance, in African Literature, Chinua Achebe has voiced his concerns for the loss of his native culture against the European values through his works *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964) among others. The theme of dominating influences of a foreign culture on the life of a contemporary post-colonial society is present in Achebe's works. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the author of *Weep Not, Child* (1964), *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) challenges capitalism, politics, and the effects of westernization on his culture. The Kenyan writer subsequently renounced Christianity and writing in English. He considered his name James Ngugi as colonialist and changed to Ngugi wa Thiong'o and began to write in his native Gikuyu and Swahili. Many emerging writers from the Northeast of India have also voiced similar protest and resistance in their literature. They have adopted both English and their vernacular as a medium of expression to counter voice against the colonial discourse. Mitra Phukan, Bhabananda Deka, Dhruba Hazarika, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Arnab Jan Deka, Jahnabi Barua, Anjum Hasan, Siddhartha Deb, Robin S. Ngangom, Kynpham Sing Nongkymrih, Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Nabina Das, Uddipana Goswami, Nitoo Das, Manash Pratim Borah and Ananya S Guha are some of the writers writing in English from Northeast India. These writers express strong political awareness by addressing issues such as identity and ethnicity, violence, terrorism, cultural disintegration and the need to embrace and preserve one's own culture and tradition.

Literature, especially poetry, has been adopted by many emerging writers from the Northeast to voice their own ethnic/tribal identity. As much as they take pride in their rich tradition and geography, there is also lamentation for the loss of their indigenous culture, traditions, beliefs and history. The appeal for identity and cultural recognition marks a recurrent theme in the poetry of the Northeast which may have occurred consciously or unconsciously, nevertheless one may draw conclusion that the drive for cultural recognition and expression of one's own identity form a deep-rooted backdrop among these writers. Some of the important names in Northeast poetry, who write in English are Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, Nilamani Phookun, Anupama Basumatary and Hiren Bhattacharya of

Assam, Robin S Ngangom and Saratchand Thiyam of Manipur, Meghalaya's Desmond Kharmawphlang and Easter Syiem, Mizoram's Mona Zote and Cherrie L. Chhangte, Tripura's Piyush Raut and Bijoy Kumar Debbarma, and Easterine Kire, Monalisa Chankija and Temsula Ao of Nagaland.

In the light of the above observations, it is evident from the literatures emanating from this region that there is a deep and mutual desire for cultural revival as they see themselves not belonging to the artificially constructed identity imposed upon them by other foreign entities. It is thus not surprising for writers like Temsula Ao who share the same objective to uphold one's own identity amidst colonization, forced or voluntary dislocation, violence and modernization to opine in an essay "Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective" thus:

The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and identities that they embody, the loss of distinct identity markers does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significances and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. Globalization in this sense will eventually reduce identity to anonymity (7).

As much as Temsula Ao craves for identity and cultural recognition of the Ao-Nagas or Nagas as a whole, she also states a note on behalf of all other tribes of the Northeast who share stark similarities in terms of their culture and traditions and have too undergone the impact of colonialism. This makes identity issues more questionable not only for the Nagas but also for other communities of the Northeast as well, which all the more affirms as to why cultural revival is necessary in the region amidst transition. The intersections wherein transition and change appear to have entered may be briefly identified as the colonial British occupation and the attendant Christianization and western education, followed by Indian Independence

in 1947 which generated conflict with the Naga nation who refused to be part of free India. As a consequence of this, what resulted were the decades of India-Naga conflict since the 1950s and which remains unresolved till date.

It was after a gap of two years in 2017 that *Aosenla's Story* was published. The book narrates the story of Aosenla as she recalls her life over the years. While Temsula Ao is worried about the identity of her people, she also ponders to understand what it is like to be a woman amidst the changing Nagaland. It is not surprising that the life of Aosenla parallels the writer in many ways. The book narrates the life of a woman, who was forced to an early marriage, having to face the many disadvantages of being a woman and wife. For Aosenla, her only wish was to have freedom over herself, an independent identity, to break away from the image of being a mere shadow of her husband. After a long process of trying to find her true self, in the end she is finally “free from her earlier insecurities and doubts. She is no longer concerned about who or what she has become. She is at last at ease, with not only herself but with her husband. She is content” (Ao, *Aosenla* 203). One may interpret Aosenla’s contentment at the end as an expression of freedom, freedom from the society, freedom from family burdens and freedom from her own self-doubt. In the book, Temsula Ao quoted Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* in the first page, “Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95), and by the end of the story, Aosenla can claim to have achieved both. Today in the Naga society, Aosenla could be any woman who has long been a silent victim of patriarchy and dominant ideology, her story can be read as Temsula Ao’s subtle expression to subvert the patriarchal authority over women through writing.

We often say that literature is the mirror of society. Literature often reflects the culture of its region, its norms, mores and values, the process of change and its impact on the people and certain types of other social facts. The works of Temsula Ao provide a wide range of the history of the Ao-Nagas from the oral tradition till the present. Her poems and short stories show how the political underground upheavals since the 1950s, the traumatic circumstances, self isolation and misery

created a deep-rooted mental unrest among the Ao-Nagas as well as the Naga people in general.

It is evident in the case of the Ao-Nagas that although education and Christianity may have many benefits, it created a gap between the new and the old, the educated children and the illiterate parents. The church gradually became a parallel force which often clashed with the age-old authority of the body-politic of the society. Thus, the people lost an integral part of their old identity.

The search for an identity between headhunt and Bible, between village structure and national sentiments, is often directed towards those few elements that still allow a link to be forged between the old, traditional culture and present-day lifestyles (Oppitz et al.12).

Like most other tribes of the Northeast, the Nagas sought for a platform to assert their rights and distinct identity, in the past they had taken recourse to arms at the cost of peace in the region. From the observance of the history of the tribe, this has only resulted in transition and cultural disintegration among the people where the identity of the tribe hangs between 'what was' and 'what is.' This has been the driving motif of Temsula Ao - to use literature as a tool to assert one's own identity and to add authenticity of the Ao-Naga oral tradition because as Pramod K. Nayar puts it, "Identity is the consequence of representation and the effect of discourse" (Nayar, *An Introduction* 26).

The literary devices and narrative strategies employed by Temsula Ao provide a vast area for study in the literary discourse emerging from the Northeast region of India. Her narrative works in the form of poems, short stories, essays, fiction and memoir provide an account of connected events that are rooted in the sociological and historical canvas of Nagaland. Her narrative techniques provide deeper insight for the reader and help the reader in imagining or visualizing situations that pertain to Nagaland and on being a Naga, linking the two worlds of the past and present.

A prominent feature in her style of narration both in the creative and non-fictional, is storytelling, which in fact is an important element of the rich oral tradition that her people uphold. Whether the written discourse is in the form of poems, stories, essays or fiction, Temsula Ao excels in the art of telling stories to her readers, presenting a graphic picture of the Naga society. As a former Fulbright fellow at the University of Minnesota in the American Indian Studies Department, Temsula Ao had learned about the culture, heritage and especially the oral tradition of the Native Americans. After returning home to India, she documented and collected the Naga myths, folktales, folklore, rituals, law, custom, belief system for twelve years. The experience and exposure during that time inspired her to record the oral tradition of her own community i.e. the Ao-Naga oral tradition, which is reflective in her narrative writing strategies. It was with these intentions that she completed her book *The Ao- Naga Oral Tradition* in 1999. The book has become an important milestone and the most authentic document in literature for studying and understanding the identity and origin of the Nagas, particularly that of the Ao-Nagas.

Based on oral tradition, the works of Temsula Ao have deep rooted connection to the core belief of their origin in Ao folklore which is reflected in her poem, “Stone-People from Lungterok.” The underlying patriotic sentiments in the founding myth of Lungterok form the backbone for tracing the origin of the Ao-Naga identity. Moreover, Temsula Ao captures the rich folklore of her oral tradition through animal tales, semi-human creatures, supernatural powers and myths that hold important significances and have been accepted by the people as an inalienable part of their tribal history and identity. These mythical portrayals in her narratives serve as a means to recover or reconstruct her community’s mythology and tradition.

Through her narrative, Temsula Ao points out how women are often projected as the weaker sex under patriarchy compared to how women are portrayed as an embodiment of power of a different kind in myths, legends and folklore. This concept of reversal of the traditional power-structure based on gender is illustrated through her four narratives drawn from Ao-Naga folklore; the story of Longkongla who possessed supernatural powers, Yajangla who could transform herself into a

tigress, Akangla who helped the Longkhum warriors in fighting the ferocious dogs and a woman with no name who possessed wit and wisdom. Even though the above women are projected in folklore as dominant characters and superior to men, in reality the image of the Ao women continues to be projected as a weaker sex under the patriarchal system. By comparing the portrayal of women in folklore and the actual status of women in the real world, Temsula Ao is able to highlight strategically the status of women in the present society by using the literary tool of subversion.

All of Temsula Ao's collection of poems have the word "Songs" in their book titles. Temsula Ao sees herself as a lyricist, this is because poems are songs in the oral tradition. As such, her 'songs' sing of her life, her people and her landscape. While Temsula Ao uses prose for more direct comments on the impact of political violence, she turns to poetry to recover and connect with the old traditions or to establish continuities with the past. Through her poems, Temsula Ao sings of her different emotions and moods, filled with elements of her personal life, love, loneliness, angst, loss, desires, confessions, faith, aging and death. Her poems, especially her early collections of poetry exhibit the technique of humour and a sense of irony. The sense of loss and loneliness writing from interesting perspectives such as that of a self-made woman and a tribal is also undeniable. Temsula Ao uses her poetry to bridge the growing distance between human beings and nature, between her people and the past, between the people and their connection with the land.

One consistent factor in the narrative style of Temsula Ao is its location i.e. Nagaland. Her writings are marked by the presence of nature either providing the backdrop, or is of historical significance. She uses land/nature as a metaphor for her people, the exploitation by various factors to portray their deteriorating identity. She utilizes different forms of nature such as forest, trees, rivers, mountains, hills and animals as a symbol to depict the identity of the people and also womanhood. In this, we may observe how Temsula Ao uses an ecofeminist approach in connecting women with nature which is prominently visible in works such as in "Lament for Earth" and short story "Laburnam for my Head." The use of pathetic fallacy - a literary term for the attribution of human emotion and conduct to things found in

nature that are not human - is also employed in her narrative, for instance in the poem “An Old Tree,” wherein the tree identifies itself with an aging human being.

Another trait of Temsula Ao’s narrative strategy lies in her boldness and originality. Kishor Kumar comments that the strength of her writings lies in, “its rootedness and its political consciousness. Nagaland in her poetry is not just a setting; it is soul of her poems” (13). The insights perceived by an insider such as Temsula Ao in the study of Naga identity cannot compare to the ethnographic and anthropological approach of an outsider, which even more affirms to the authenticity of her works. The collection of essays, *On Being a Naga: Essays* highlights the honest views of Temsula Ao not only as an Ao-Naga but also the Naga identity in general. She strategically uses her essays to narrate the need for “re-appraisal of Naga history and identity” (Ao, *On Being* ix). Hence, the essays can be viewed as the author’s straightforward articulation of her thoughts on what it has meant to be a Naga in the past, and what makes the Naga today amidst the various changes.

While Temsula Ao’s poetry may be seen as an expression of oneself and to some, her essays as social propaganda, her short stories deal more with the political upheavals of a troubled Nagaland since the 1950s. Set in the period of Nagaland’s struggle for independence, her narrative storytelling is woven with terror, violence and trauma, and how it continues to affect her people till today. Temsula Ao has a way of narrating stories that touch on humanistic issues. She maintains her lyrical tone even in her short stories, fiction or memoir. Her technique of storytelling continues in her memoir where the element of self-reflection and retrospection is strongly seen, which is also a unique trait in her other creative works as well. Temsula Ao also often employs the literary technique of narrating a story within a story. She often employs her characters to narrate a story on her behalf. The storytelling persona makes its first entry in the form of the grandmother in the short story “The Last Song,” followed by Imtisashi in “An Old Man Remembers,” both from the collection *These Hills Called Home*.

Another feature we witness is that Temsula Ao resorts to rhetoric to reveal what is running through a character’s mind. For instance, in *Aosenla’s Story*, Aosenla

wonders: “Why was she thinking this way? Wasn’t she outraged at all? Didn’t she feel betrayed? Didn’t she want to confront Bendang with this truth?” (118). Although Temsula Ao is revealing what is going through the character’s mind, these questions also run through the reader’s mind. By asking rhetorical questions, Temsula Ao is also asking the reader what he would do if he were placed in Aosenla’s position. Such techniques in handling her narrative make Temsula Ao a master craftsman where literary style is concerned.

In her short stories and fiction, Temsula Ao often chooses characters among ordinary people of the society, thereby painting a picture of ordinary events of Naga life. This broadens the insight of the Naga society as the reader walks through the settings from the perspective of ordinary people from diversified social groups such as women, illiterate women, servant boy, hunters or villagers. Temsula Ao is a master at using imagery in her narratives. In this way, she creates realistic visuals for the reader that appeal to their senses thus enabling them to capture the mood of that setting. In most of her narratives, the characters are engaged with daily occupations such as weaving, pottery, hunting etc. which in turn highlight the occupation of the Naga society within that timeframe.

Temsula Ao deals on recurring themes such as lamentation for the loss of their indigenous culture, traditions, beliefs and history, those relating to women’s identity in the context of patriarchy and the theme of violence and power struggles. The appeal for identity and cultural recognition also marks a recurrent theme in her works. In this light, Temsula Ao may also be seen as a facilitator of the new generation in helping to re-imagine and realize the value of their rich oral tradition through her works. Presenting her readers with the spirit of nationalism and identity also marks one of the prominent narrative strategies which she incorporates into her writings.

Hence, this study is an attempt to look at what creates the old and new Ao-Naga identity, and what are the factors that have contributed to this process of transition or synthesis if any. Has their identity changed with their departure from their old traditions or is it built upon the old? In order to address these questions,

there arises a need to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity. Temsula Ao writes that “Identities are made, un-made and re-made” (Ao, *On Being* 10), and this thesis in the following chapters will seek to re-imagine how these identities are re-made in the course of transition or cultural disintegration amidst socio-political and ideological dimensions through her works.

The following chapters seek to work on these very issues on re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity through the works of Temsula Ao. Chapter 2 of this thesis is titled “Transition and Cultural Disintegration among the Ao-Naga Tribe” which will study the cultural and traditional transition that has taken place among the Ao-Naga tribe. It will be a study of the intersections of culture, tradition and modernity from the parameters of religion, education and socio-political and economic transitions, and how these have helped shape the Ao-Naga identity, giving references to the primary texts. Chapter 3 “Violence and ‘Benevolent Subordination’ ” will analyze the political conflict and violence that besieged Nagaland since the 1950s, which resulted in exploitation and deprivation that led to despairing subordination on the part of the tribal community. The description of human life and human conditions in the works of Temsula Ao in the backdrop of the region’s political unrest will be studied, and how these factors have contributed to the re-imagining of the Ao-Naga identity. In chapter 4 “Ao-Naga women under Patriarchy and Dominant Ideology” the study will analyze the Ao-Naga women in Temsula Ao’s works under patriarchal authority wherein the culture exercises a dominant ideology which dictates specific roles to be played out by the women – in other words an ideology that incorporates different binaries such as man/woman, culture/nature and the intricate relationship between nature and women. In the light of the above study, chapter 5 will evaluate the findings of the research and provide a conclusion as to how the readings of Temsula Ao’s works bring together the concept of the old and the re-imagined Ao-Naga identity amidst violence, insurgency, patriarchy, institutionalized ideologies, cultural disintegration and modernity in Nagaland.

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CHAPTER 2

TRANSITION AND CULTURAL DISINTEGRATION AMONG THE AO-NAGA TRIBE

One of the prominent factors for the need to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity may be traced to the fact that the Ao-Naga tribe has undergone various transitions over the years resulting in a cultural disintegration which questions their groundings on identity. In order to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity, this chapter will locate the factors responsible for the process of transition and how these transitions may or may not be held responsible for the cause of cultural disintegration among the tribe. Transition in this study simply means the process of change from one state or condition to another. When the transition witnesses a shift in culture or values, it may also be termed as cultural transition. The cause of transition among the Ao-Naga tribe in this chapter may be briefly identified as the colonization, Christianity, western education and the Indian Independence which generated conflict within the Naga tribe. The internal factionalism that set in later in politics, the wave of modernity and globalization also contributes to the process of change.

Although transitions do have their benefits, the process of change and gradual shift in culture affected the Naga people in various ways. In most of the cases, the negative aspects of the effects of transition often outweigh the positive. This often leads to cultural disintegration among the people who are exposed to colonialism, foreign belief and western education etc. Cultural disintegration implies assimilation to a different and dominant culture which often has negative effects on the people or individuals. Disintegration results in destruction or division of something that was once whole, and when we talk of disintegration of culture, it directly affects the loss of cultural identity too. Hence, this chapter will analyse the various elements of transition and cultural disintegration among the Ao-Naga Tribe in the works of Temsula Ao. Although this thesis is based on the Ao-Naga tribe, the term 'Ao-Naga' will sometimes be used interchangeably with the term 'Naga' to represent the collective tribes of Nagaland since the Ao-Naga tribe is one among the major tribes

of Nagaland sharing and facing the same histories along with other communities under the collective Naga tribe.

The works of Temsula Ao in the form of her poems, short stories, essays and non-fiction provide a substantial amount of information on The Ao-Nagas and the Nagas as a tribe. Unlike many works and documents written by outsiders of the community, the works of Temsula Ao portray its people and the land as perceived from inside her own society, as she herself belongs to the Ao-Naga tribe. Hence, the study of this thesis holds a different viewpoint compared to others preceding it as the study situates its base on the works of an insider, Temsula Ao. The primary works selected for this study offer an insight to the Naga history tracing their origin back to the Oral Tradition, and in doing so it also delves not only into the collective Naga tribe, but also the Ao-Naga tribe in particular. Detailed references to the Ao-Naga tribe is given particularly in Temsula Ao's book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) and *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014). Tilottoma Misra writes in the Foreword to the book *On Being a Naga: Essays* of how Temsula Ao's essays show a deep concern for the cultural loss suffered by the people during the colonial period and after, and "the urgent need to search for the historical roots which can define the 'Naga Identity', not as perceived by 'others' but as viewed from inside the society" (xv).

The Ao-Naga tribe has come a long way from their world of oral traditions to the modern world. Their identity is reflected through their customs, beliefs, skills, language, rituals, architecture, music, dance and handicrafts which have been handed down through generations in the form of oral tradition and material culture. One may question what exactly is the Ao-Naga identity and why is there a need re-imagine it? On identity, Temsula Ao writes, "For a Naga, identity is a many-layered concept" (Ao, *Identity* 6). This is because the Naga identity is based on so many factors, each tribe having its own distinct customs, language and dress. Temsula Ao traces the origin of the Ao-Naga identity to the "Stone People from Lungterok,"

LUNGTEROK

The six Stones

Where the progenitors
 And forebears
 Of the stone-people
 Were Born
 Out of the womb
 Of the earth.

...

STONE-PEOPLE

Savage and sage
 Who sprang out of LUNGTEROK (Ao, *Book of Songs* 109)

In the poem, Temsula Ao captures the origin of the Ao-Nagas wherein she refers to them as the “STONE-PEOPLE’ who are “poetic and politic, barbaric and balladic” (109). The poem highlights how “knowledgeable” the stone-people were, and the deep connection they shared with nature. She also captures the various occupation associated with the Ao-Naga tribe.

STONE-PEOPLE

The potters and weavers
 Planters and growers
 Hunters and carvers
 Singers of songs and taker of heads,
 Gentle lovers and savage heroes.
 Builders of homes and destroyers of villages (Ao, *Book of Songs* 110).

Although no historical or material support exists for the myths of their origin, they have been accepted by the people as an inalienable principle of their tribal history. In the conclusion to *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Temsula Ao justifies that “the unquestioning acceptance of the tradition of the people as the way of life has been the strength of the system which exists even today in every Ao village” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 184).

A Naga's identity is deeply rooted in the village of his birth and residence. To belong to a particular village is central to a Naga's identity because it assigns him a specific space, both ethnic and linguistic. In her essay "Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective," Temsula Ao writes that "A Naga who is banished from his ancestral village for political, social or criminal offences is like a person without a country. There is no greater humiliation for a Naga than this fate" (Ao, *Identity* 7). Hence, from the above lines, one may observe the significance which a place of origin has in defining one's own identity. So even though the Nagas based their origin solely on oral tradition, there seem to be no trace of them questioning their identity then. They were self-sufficient and independent in their own social fabric and beliefs. Although the Nagas had had interaction with other hill tribes and the plains of Assam, they were minimal and often confined to the Northeast of India, so up to that point the Naga cultural identity remained inviolate, and this has been no different for the Ao-Naga tribe as well. The Ao-Nagas maintained a close-knit and well organised society governed by their rich oral tradition.

However, all cultures and traditions do change through time. They do not remain static. The Ao-Naga tradition is no exception. The changes and continuities of these traditions occur in every sphere of life which marks the identity of communities/tribes. Continuity is an important constituent of identity, the failure of which eventually results in deterioration or extinction. Richard Jenkins in his book *Social Identity* (2008) holds the same view when he says that, "Change, or its prospect, is particularly likely to provoke concerns about identity" (26) and that "change also reveals itself in the intimate details of individual lives, and the privacies of the person occupy a particular and important place in contemporary social science discourses about identity" (Jenkins 34). To take up the study of transition of any culture, the approach challenges the constraints of nationality, race, gender or other group identities at any given time. Therefore, in order to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity, one needs to probe into the factors of change that has sustained the continuity of the tribe from the origin myth of Lungterok till the present.

Since the Ao-Nagas have come a long way in adopting a new way of life, their identity, both personal and social, have undergone transitions. The intersections

wherein transition and change appear to have entered may be briefly identified as the colonial British occupation and the attendant Christianization and western education, followed by Indian Independence in 1947 which generated conflict with the Naga nation who refused to be part of free India. As a consequence of this, what resulted were the decades of India-Naga conflict since the 1950s which remains unresolved till today.

One of the first foreign influences on the Nagas was the entry of the Christian missionaries, with Dr. E. W. Clarke being the first to reach the land in 1872. Abraham Lotha in “Naga’s Conversion to Christianity and Modernity in Colonial India” mentions specifically that Dr. E.W. Clark first established his mission among the Ao-Nagas in 1876 (Lotha 77). The teachings of the Christian missionaries sowed the first seeds of inferiority in the minds of the tribal community. The conversion to Christianity happened quite rapidly and their old festivals, rites and rituals, singing of folksongs soon became taboo to the new generation of believers. Before that, the Ao-Nagas practiced animism and the sun, moon, rivers, stones, trees etc. were worshipped as deities. However, when they embraced Christianity, worship of nature contained in songs, myths, legends, folktales, folksongs and proverbs began to be considered a pagan practice. The church gradually became a parallel force which often clashed with the age-old authority of the body-politic of the society. For instance, the concept of *tiya* which determines the fate of a person and the concept of the soul *tanula* were considered heathen, the belief in animism and other deities were replaced with the concept of one God, the concept of *Myutsungba* (god of justice) and *sangsunu* (where the untruthful ones go to) were replaced by the Christian version of heaven and hell. *Madhu* or rice-beer which was consumed on all important public and religious occasions was prohibited, and drunkenness was denounced. Traditionally, the Ao-Nagas disposed of their dead by laying the corpse in specially constructed platforms in the burial grounds located beyond the perimeters or the villages. Christianity considered this as barbaric and unhygienic and banned the practice too. The mourning period of six days for men and five days for women were reduced to three days irrespective of the gender. Moreover, the practice of Ao women adorning themselves with traditional tattoos on their face, arms and legs were

also banned. L. Sosang Jamir traces the early 1950s as the period when the girls stop tattooing in the Ao community (Jamir 78). These are the few among many other changes brought about by the acceptance of a new religion. Dr. Mary Clark, the wife of E.W Clark writes, “ Every form of demon worship, open or suspected, was attacked – Sunday-breaking, rice-beer drinking, licentiousness, and all social vices . . . singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation” (Yanthan et. al. 79).

In the old tradition, taboo or auspicious days were calculated based on the cycle of the moon, but according to the new religion only Sabbath or Sunday was observed as holy. One prominent oversight made by the missionaries was their failure to distinguish between animism and Naga culture. Many components of Naga culture were treated as part of animism and were forbidden, for instance, singing of folk-songs and dancing were forbidden. Singing of folk-songs was replaced by hymn-singing despite the fact that no occasion was complete unless accompanied by the singing of folk-songs. This particular change brought much cultural disintegration because these folk-songs contained the tribe’s history of all important aspects of their social life including their migration, settlements, heroic deeds etc. By discarding the folksongs, they have lost a crucial medium for preserving their identity which is an important element in their oral tradition. These, among many others, were practices that ceased to exist with the advent of Christianity. Thus, in such cases as these, the people lost an integral part of their old identity. However, the polyphonic notes and harmonising of the old folksongs do find its place in the Naga community singing today. In the story “The Last Song” in *These Hills Called Home* (2006), Temsula Ao has included an important fact in her narration saying that, “Naga traditional songs consist of polyphonic notes and harmonising is the dominant feature of the community singing” (Ao, *These Hills* 24). The voice of Apenyo grew in volume and harmony and consisted of “loud shrieks and scream” (23) which in fact contain elements of the polyphonic tones of the old folksongs. Imo Lanutemjen Aier has also written in his book *Contemporary Naga Social Formations and Ethnic Identity* (2006) about slavery among the Ao-Nagas in the olden days. Slaves were acquired from the battle and raids. L. Sosang Jamir also mentions in *Ao Naga*

Customary Laws and Practices (2012) how slaves were regarded as a matter of prestige in the Ao society (139). For the Ao-Nagas, slaves meant wealth as it amplified the economic production. Aier further notes that, “Slaves among the Ao tribe had no possession, name and no membership/representation within a clan” (32). This shows that the tribe is not altogether free of inequality contrary to the popular belief that the Ao-Nagas lived a rather equal status in their society. The extra slave labour often helped the wealthy men in conducting the feast of merit too. However, the practice of the slave system was abolished along with the feast of merit prior to the advent of the British and Christianity.

The feast of merit had served as an important communal aspect in the olden times because it was a direct link to gaining prestige and honour. The feast of merit or *Zatho* could only be conducted by a wealthy man called *Takar*, and hence the feast of merit was an important motivational drive among the men folk to work hard and gain honour from their fellow people. But with its abolition, the Nagas began to hoard food to later sell for their own private profit. Furer-Haimendorf commented in *Naked Nagas* (1939) that the very notion of capitalism in the villages was instituted for the first time by the missionaries (52).

In the olden times, the Naga villages were adorned with sculpted poles, and the houses of those who had performed feasts of merit were rewarded with the handiwork of special craftsmen. But with the coming of Christianity, those works were considered pagan propaganda. Today, only a small number of Naga craftsmen exist. Furer-Haimendorf again points out that Christianity objected to the practice of feasts of merit presumably because the animals consumed during the feast were not just slaughtered but sacrificed with appropriate invocations of the spirits (53). These practices were frowned upon by the missionaries as according to them to embrace Christianity required dismantling the indigenous culture. This notion was further espoused by the fact that indigenous culture was considered archaic, primitive, savage and uncivilized. Similar to the views of Furer-Haimendorf, W.C Smith writes in his book *The Ao-Naga Tribes of Assam* (1980),

Familiarity with missionary attitudes and practices which are all too characteristic, make inevitable the conclusion that there is entirely too much negation, too much 'taboo' and too little that is positive (224).

From the above observation, one may conclude that religion is often used to appropriate one's own propaganda. Religion is often served as a wheel that propels ethnic minorities in the transition to a new society. In the case of the Ao-Nagas, religion served as the cause for the initial transitional changes in the society, complimented by various other factors like literacy and formal education.

The literate tradition of the Ao-Nagas also started with the coming of the American Christian missionaries. Before, the worldview that permeated and sustained the lifestyle and culture of that particular community was contained in its oral tradition. Hence literacy had its disadvantages too. Adding to that, K.S. Nongkynrih writes, "The literary legacy of the missionaries can be said to be double-edged. While, on the one hand, they gifted the tribes with a common literary heritage, on the other, they made them deny the existence of their own literatures in their rich oral traditions and taught them to be ashamed of whatever is theirs, as something pagan and preposterous" (Ngangom and Nongkynrih x-xi). What Nongkynrih has pointed out in the above lines holds an important observation because the more educated the people become, the more alienated they feel to their old tradition. The western education has taught and inculcated a new yardstick of comparison where the new teachings surpass the oral tradition in every way. Bill Ashcroft et al. hold the same observation among the colonised people in their book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) in which they write, "One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as a norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities" (7). Since the western education system uses English as its medium, the Ao language like all other dialects of the Naga tribe had lost their value especially in government jobs and services.

In the case of the Ao-Nagas, one of the first and most noticeable changes brought by western education was the replacement of *Arju* with schools. When the

villagers were initially reluctant to join the new education system, the system of 'Room' was introduced, and then gradually replaced by schools in the 1870s. The establishment of schools introduced a new type of learning which was completely different from the institution of the *Arju* or male dormitory. A new social group emerged – the learners (*tuzunger*) and the non-learners (*mazunger*). Temsula Ao observes this change among the new learners,

They [educated] were not willing to return to a way of life in which their new found knowledge did not seem to fit in. They had to find new lifestyles to suit their new found status as educated individuals. For this, they needed a new environment (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 187).

Although education had many benefits, say for instance the improvement of the sanitary conditions of the people and a healthier food habit, it also created a gap between the educated children and the illiterate parents. Whatever the forefathers had passed on to the new generations through oral tradition was considered primitive nonsense according to the British rulers, and great honours of *O tashi* (one who knows many words) had been replaced by secular education. The educated people started to relocate to the urban areas seeking for jobs that would fit their education, in the process they slowly drifted away from the traditions of their forefathers. In this way, the demographic displacement also contributed to the factors which bring about cultural disintegration among the Ao-Nagas.

Moreover, the establishment of schools demanded a new kind of dressing code with shorts, shirts and a western hair-cut. Earlier, the Ao-Naga boys and men had their hair cut round their heads with no partings and were often barefoot and naked except for their tribal shawls. The minimal clothing which defined 'naga' as the naked people were now influenced to dress in the way which the western colonizers considered proper. School routine often interfered with agricultural duties which meant that their primary sustenance on agriculture was hindered by the new system.

Tuisem A. Shishak has pointed out in "Nagas and Education: Back to Basic" that the main objective of the British education system was to produce clerks,

interpreters, etc. and that the colonial education remained theoretical and literary for the most part of their rule, providing no practical (vocational, technical) education to improve the living conditions of the people (Shishak 219). Once enrolled in school, daily attendance was mandatory. This in turn affected the labour pattern because students had to attend school by day and do homeworks by night. The new lifestyle replaced the opportunity to engage oneself in activities like knitting, weaving, farming or hunting. As such, it created a mentality that manual work was only for the illiterate. Moreover, since not every village had schools, boys and girls had to move to other villages further away from their home which led to more demographic displacement. With the absence of *Arju* and *Tsuki*, their socialization became very limited. This gradually broke down the formerly close-knit village community.

Administration of the village too suffered the process of change. In the old tradition, each village was governed by a ruling body called *Putu Menden* formed by representatives of each clan in the village called *Tatars*, however this ruling body had been dissolved and replaced by new legal system imposed by the colonial rulers and then by the Indian political party system. The existence of the *Putu Menden* was of great significance for the Ao-Naga society because it served as the preservation of cultural heritage of all traditional values, cultures and customs of the village. Temsula Ao comments that, “our transition from our insulated ignorance to knowledge of the outside world by such alien methods was so abrupt that it shook our worldview to its core” (Ao, *On Being* 5). The new literate tradition set aside the old oral tradition preceding it. The natives, under the influence of the missionaries with their new belief system and formal education, started to replace their old tradition with the new. In the process, vital aspects of their tribal ancestry were lost. This transition from the old to the new has been expressed elaborately by Temsula Ao in her poem “Blood of Other Days” from *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013) capturing significant details about the transition which the Naga society has gone through. The poem provides a chronicle of the process of transition that took place in Naga history which holds significant groundings to the study of this thesis. The full-length poem is presented below:

In the by-gone days of the other life

Before the advent of the WORD
Spilling the blood of foes
Was the honour-code

Head-takers became acclaimed
Tribal heroes, earning the merit
To wear special cloths and ornaments
And live in grand houses.

We believed that our gods lived
In the various forms of nature
Whom we worshipped
With unquestioning faith.

Then came a tribe of strangers
Into our primordial territories
Armed with only a Book and
Promises of a land called Heaven.

Declaring that our Trees and Mountains
Rocks and Rivers were no Gods
And that our songs and stories
Nothing but tedious primitive nonsense.

We listened in confusion
To the new stories and too soon
Allowed our knowledge of other days
To be trivialized into taboo.

We no longer dared to sing
Our old songs in worship
To familiar spirits of the land

Or in praise to our legendary heroes.

And if we ever told stories it was
To the silent forests and our songs
Were heard only by the passing wind
In a land swept clean of ancient gods.

Stripped of all our basic certainties
We strayed from our old ways
And let our soul-mountain recede
Into a tiny ant-hill and we

Schooled our minds to become
The ideal tabula rasa
On which the strange intruders
Began scripting a new history.

We stifled our natural articulations
Turned away from our ancestral gods
And abandoned accustomed rituals
Beguiled by the promise of a new heaven.

We borrowed their minds,
Aped their manners,
Adopted their gods
And became perfect mimics.

Discarded our ancient practice
Of etching on wood and stone
And learned instead to scratch on paper
In premature tryst with the magic Script (*Ao, Books of Songs 297*).

The above poem is a detailed chronicling of the transition that the Nagas have undergone since the advent of Christianity, education and a new system of legal administration. In the above poem, Tamsula Ao also points out how their connection with nature and their worship as god were considered “primitive nonsense” and that much of their old songs, stories and rituals were “trivialized into taboo.” She also reflects on how the “spilling of blood of foes was the honour-code” and “Head-takers became acclaimed tribal heroes.” Although Tamsula Ao laments on the loss of various practices, one would agree that the abolition of the practice of headhunting could offer a relief in today’s context. The British administrators came in with their laws and what was once considered trophies of victory became evidence of murder and therefore punishable. In today’s world, headhunting would be against all odds when it comes to global humanity, and thus in some ways, with the passing of time, many traditional practices do die a natural death as they gradually lose their relevance and value. For instance, in the Indian context, the abolition of Sati is something which is better and more humane for the society as a whole. However, for a culture already rich with tradition, forcing a foreign belief system only result in cultural disintegration because as Tamsula Ao puts it, they are only aping their manners and becoming perfect mimics.

We borrowed their minds,
 Aped their manners,
 Adopted their gods
 And became perfect mimics (Ao, *Book of Songs* 297).

The above lines echo Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology*, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (64). It is evident that he who dominates material production controls mental production too, so here too it can be seen how the British colonisers hold the dominant political power over the Ao-Nagas thereby controlling their mental constructions. However Terry Eagleton argues in his book *Ideology: An Introduction* (2007) that, “the other side of the story, however, is equally important. For if such dominion fails to yield its victims sufficient gratification over an

extended period of time, then it is certain that they will finally revolt against it” (xxiii). Mere mimicking of the ruling class resulted in an ambiguous mixture of misery, often at times these miseries clearly outweigh the gratifications. In such cases, the victims are more likely to revolt specially “when there is more to be gained than to be lost by such action” (xxiii). Hence, since dominant colonial power succeeded by the Indian political power among the Nagas fails to yield ‘sufficient gratification’ as pointed out by Terry Eagleton, what ensued was the political rise of the Naga nationalist movement.

The “straitjacketing dogma” (*Eagleton 4*) did not work for the collective whole, and as a result, led to a cultural awakening. In *Ao Naga World-View: A Dialogue* (2015), the villagers accepted that people were truthful and hardworking in the olden days. On being asked which world was better, the world of their forefather’s time or the world after conversion to Christianity, Yabangchila Imchen, one of the villagers said, “There is indeed a wide gap between these two worlds. Our ancestors’ wealth was generated by their hard work and through truthful means. However, in today’s world without telling lies, one does not earn anything” (Miri 195). Imchen is an example of one among the tribe, who refused to convert to Christianity. Although her parents had converted to Christianity, she followed the Ao religion and refused to go to school because that was where they were asked to accept Christianity. A remedy may lie in the cohesiveness of the village institutions and the powerful influence of the church, both of which can play a major role in channelling the people’s effort towards collective good. However, even today, the origin myth of Lungterok of Aos, their distinct clan divisions and the custom of exogamous marriage are still practiced by most of the people. This clearly exemplifies how myths can still be a lived reality even in the contemporary world.

Although in the “Jungle Major” in *These Hills Called Home*, the marriage between two lovers, Punaba and Khatila, was condemned by the clansmen because the boy came from a minor clan and was poor, on the other hand, the girl belonged to a wealthy family from the major clan. “The girl’s father was soundly berated by his clansmen, who said he was lowering the prestige of their clan by agreeing to the match” (Ao, *These Hills* 1). Commenting on the issue of the Ao-Naga marriage,

Temsula Ao mentions in her book “The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition” that the Ao marriages is rarely influenced by material considerations such as dowry or bride-price, however she mentions how people prefer alliance with a major clan member, and that family history with lunacy, diseases and criminal records are often avoided (46-47). The Ao marriage rarely witnessed a forced marriage, however, the Ao Customary Law demands that the boy should build a new house before their marriage. In the olden times, after the marriage feast, the girl would be escorted to the new house where the boy will be waiting with his friends, she would be received with songs of welcome and the slaying of cockerel by the boy’s father. It is interesting to note that in the olden days, the boy does not sleep with the new bride for seven days, and he could only consummate his marriage life on the eighth day. Looking at the present scenario, today marriages are solemnised in churches and most celebrations aligns with the western celebrations.

Like marriage, funeral service too has undergone change. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the mourning period of six day for men and five days for women in the olden times has been reduced to three days for both. Moreover, funerals are now solemnised with prayers and Bible reading. However, Temsula Ao points out how the people still believe in the immortality of the soul, and that the departed soul has to cross the river *Longritsu* (stream of bitterness) in order to reach the land of the dead. She further comments, “The ancient belief about the spirituality and immortality of the soul thus finds continued expression through this ritualistic farewell, even though a new religion has replaced the old” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 188). The observance above holds as one of the few example of how the traditional beliefs still hold relevance to the people in the contemporary time amidst transition.

On further probing into the Ao-Naga tradition, there is always a unique presence of nature in the form of simple backdrop scenery, or as spirit and souls, which all play a vital role in their tradition. The role that nature plays for the Ao-Nagas, more so for the people of the North-East, is note worthy. Nature is intrinsically woven to their identities. As such, the writings of Temsula Ao also reflect nature as she writes about her tradition. In the field of literature, the relation to nature is termed as ecocriticism. Ecocriticism studies the “relationship between

literature and environment” (Nayar 242). Temsula Ao often asserts the identity of her people through the metaphors of trees, mountains and animals. The symbol of mountain recurs in her poems and becomes an allegorical rendering of the glory of Ao-Nagas.

And if you fail
 To find the secret
 And the majestic thought
 At the top of the mountain
 You have climbed it in vain (Ao, *Book of Songs* 68).

For the Ao-Naga, nature is not just a source of sustenance but more of an extension of identity and roots. Thus, harm to nature immediately affects the question of identity. When the Christian missionaries debunked their beliefs of worshipping the various forms of nature and that their songs and stories were “nothing but tedious primitive nonsense” (Ao, *Book of Songs* 296), ultimately it questions their identities because for them, the spirits of the trees, rivers and mountains held a deep connection with their ancestral roots. “In a land swept clean of ancient gods” (297), their ancestral belief became questionable and led to distortion of identity. Adding to that, the Ao-Nagas were not only refrained from worshipping nature, but nature itself was depleting as a result of the changing human activity. Disturbing the balance of nature or harming the hills ultimately becomes a threat to their identities. In the poem “Lament for Earth,” Temsula Ao laments on the once unpenetrated forest and river which abound in rich flora and fauna. But now the forest “now lies silent” and the river has become muddy “choking with the remains of her sister the forest” (Ao, *Book of Songs* 43).

Grieve for the rape of an earth
 That once was verdant, vibrant
 Virgin (44).

The above lament is also found in her poem, “My Hills” where she notes the changes that occur in the hills that she call her own.

The sound and sights
 Have altered
 In my hills
 ...
 I no longer know my hills,
 The birdsong is gone,
 Replaced by the staccato
 Of sophisticated weaponry (Ao, *Book of Songs* 157).

As seen in the above, the transition from the old ways to the new is very much reflective in the poems of Temsula Ao. One may note that the gradual change from the old tradition often parallels the change in nature as well. In addition to the growing Naga population, change in the natural environment is also caused by political upheaval that was brewing in the land since the 1950s. The turbulent times in the Naga history not only hamper the people and the society as a whole, but it also hampers the land since villages, farms and forests were burnt, important ancient sites were destroyed and trampled. In the short story "An Old Man Remembers" in *These Hills Called Home*, the old man Sashi recollects how a village "was being reconstructed on an ancient site" (Ao, *These Hills* 111). Some villages were overpopulated due to village grouping, in such cases the surrounding environment suffered. Since the identity of the Ao-Nagas is deeply ingrained in nature, the deterioration of their surroundings in the form of nature can also be seen as a sign of their deteriorating society caused by the process of transition.

The process of transition is also caused by the onset of the nationalist movement amongst the Nagas since the withdrawal of the British from India after India's Independence in 1947. The signs of cultural disintegration were already prevalent among the Ao-Nagas and other tribe as well prompted by the impact of Christianity, western education and British colonization. What follows these historical events was the onset of the political revolution of the Naga nationalist movement. As much as the Ao-Nagas question their own identities in the course of transition, the complexity of their doubts thickens as they have now become an Indian. On the discussion of the Naga nationalist movement against the Indian army,

the people of Nagaland would be referred as ‘the Nagas’ and not a specific study of ‘the Ao-Nagas’ because the historical event holds true for every tribe of Nagaland. In referring the collective Naga tribe, the inclusion of the Ao-Naga tribe may be acknowledged.

The Naga National Council led by A.Z. Phizo was constituted in 1946 which demanded a political union of their ancestral and native groups. However, the Naga Hills remained a part of the province of Assam after the independence of India in 1947. Since then Nagaland’s democratic experience has been painful and complex which led to an insurgency running parallel in its transition from the traditional way of life to the modern. The nationalist movement was followed by violent incidents that damaged the social structure, both government and civil. Subsequently, Nagaland attained statehood in 1963 with the enactment of the state of Nagaland Act in 1962 by the Parliament of India and Kohima was declared as the state capital. In 1964, cease-fire was negotiated between the Government of India and the Naga Underground, the first democratically elected Nagaland Legislative Assembly was also constituted in the same year. Henceforth, legislators had to be elected and through these elections a new culture emerged which created deep divides and turned the traditional way of life into a form of ‘modernity’ both among the rural and urban population. Rahul Goswami observes these changes in his article *Socio-economic Realities in Nagaland*, “In less than a century, Naga tribal society has had to shift from nomadism and headhunting, to settled agriculture, from barter to currency, from self-contained village republic economies to a conditional funds flow that emanated from the political centre of India” (Goswami 159).

What happens when this proud and self-respecting Naga is suddenly made into an Indian citizen, hoisted with a tag totally unknown to him? A conflict of identity begins because the former Naga identity is quite different from that of the Indian identity. One may observe the difference not just in terms of tradition, but also in terms of physical appearance, culture, clothing, food habit etc. The diversity in their differences made the Nagas more alienated and nothing close to being an Indian. As such, to be a Naga as well as an Indian is living parallel identities with no meeting point.

Moreover, in 1975, the Shillong Accord was signed between the representatives of the Naga Underground and Indian Government in which the Accord stated that the Nagas would accept the Indian constitution. This further created a dispute among the Undergrounds which eventually led to factionalism. The prominent faction groups were the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland who used “Nagaland for Christ” as their slogan, and other two factions called the Isak Muivah faction and the Khaplang faction which disintegrated from the Naga National Council. Regarding these factions, Esterine Kire, a prominent Naga writer, writes in her “Author’s Introduction” to her book *Bitter Wormwood* (2011),

The factions began killing off the leaders of the Naga National Council, and drug addicts and drug peddlers, as well as members of their rival groups on a large scale right through the 80’s, 90’s and up till 2008. In a continuous infighting amongst the Naga freedom fighters, Naga society was riven apart by extortion, and rapid brutalization (4).

This transition from the once unified Naga society to divided factions, from the idea of a sovereign nation to being oppressed by Indian Army led to an inevitable disintegration in the society wherein their culture, tradition and identity deteriorates as well.

Amidst the political upheaval and the society falling apart, it is the common people who suffer the most. No individual was spared from the terror and violence that ensued the political conflict. With the question of identity and the emergence of new pattern of societal life, there arose, according to Sarup, isolation and loneliness - “Strangers seem to be suspended in the empty space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them right to entry” (Sarup10). The fear of losing their Naga identity and the split in opinions gave rise to much doubt and confusion among the people. The statehood imposed Indian citizenship among the Nagas, however, it also denied many of the rights of the citizens of India. This confused state of mind is reflected in one of the poems “A Strange Place” written by Temsula Ao,

This world is a strange place

Where people are
 Exiled in their own lands
 And imprisoned in their own minds (Ao, *Books of Songs* 13).

The Nagas did not have a choice in the matter “and in the process of accommodating this duality; the people are inexorably pulled towards the forces of globalization” (Ao, *Identity* 7). The question of dual identity can be studied in relation to globalization which is a challenge to cultures all over the world, especially marginalized communities like the Ao-Naga tribe. Many of Temsula Ao’s short stories serve as commentaries on this conflict of dual identities. *These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) consists of ten short stories which captures crucial scenarios during the troubled times. The collection contains various character sketches of people who are part of this upheaval in recent Naga history brought on by the struggle for self determination against the Indian Union. In the short story, “The Jungle Major,” Temsula Ao writes how the initial stages of dislocation of the Nagas began with the method called village grouping, where the Indian Army would dislodge villagers from their ancestral sites and group them in zones. As villages became the target of army operations, many Nagas migrated into towns. The uprooting of the people from the soil of their origin and restricting their freedom was the most humiliating insult to the Naga psyche. The significance of nature and land as intrinsically woven to their identities has been discussed in the previous chapter 1. Baruram Swami talks about the relation of land and identity in his article,

Ethnic identity in the concept of space has to do with property, self-possession and the politics of sovereignty. It is also realised in the possession of a sovereign land. Realising identity begins with claiming of land. Territorial land plays an important role in shaping cultural and ethnic identity. Realising identity begins with claiming of land (Swami 3).

Thus, the possession of land is a crucial factor in order to situate the ethnic identity among the Nagas, failure of which leads to disintegration among the people and society, affecting the cultural and traditional homogeneity of the Naga people.

Referring to the three strains of oral tradition classified by Temsula Ao in *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) viz. the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary, the Secondary Tradition revolves around the village and the Tertiary on the clan. When the Indian Army forced grouping of villages, these strains of tradition ultimately suffered too. The well-knit village with its exclusive clan genealogy was jeopardized. For a village whose clan distinction was held to be very important to their social life, their physical relocation resulted in the relocation of their identities too. This sociological process of relocation led to the rise of a new class of people with new identities. In “A New Chapter,” another short story in *These Hills Called Home*, the character of Nungsang shows the rise to success of a new class of people, forging makeshift alliances in unfamiliar political spaces. Here, the character of Nungsang represents a new class of businessmen with new vocation, who has connections to both the underground and the Indian Army.

Relocation due to new occupation can also be seen as agent of the formation of the Naga urban population. For example, the growth of Mokokchung is enhanced by the increasing opportunity in terms of service network. Imo Lanutemjen Aier rightly describes it as “a social melting pot of diverse villages and tribes” (60). The outcome of this melting pot is the gradual breakdown of tribal communal spirits since the urban places becomes a fusion of various tribes with common pursuits such as service to the government or commercial entrepreneurship. Aier comments, thus “began the phase of rural-urban migration in search of new livelihood and most of all, the beginning of inter-tribal existence, transcending the communal differences” (65). This information is important because according to Temsula Ao in *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Mokokchung is basically an Ao tribal town by location, however today, Mokokchung does not solely consist of the Ao-Naga tribe.

There can be multiple identities which operate at personal and family level, gender, sex, class and clan, community, social, global, national, local levels. According to social identity theory formulated by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, identity can broadly be categorized as personal and social. Personal identity is the set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self as an individual; Social identity refers to the social relations with other individuals and groups. For the Ao-Naga tribe, to

belong in a village is the first requisite of an individual in building up a notion of identity as a tribe. For them “the clan is the central theme around which the entire gamut of their social life revolves. Thus both men and women draw their primary identity in the society as members of the clan unit” (Goswami164).

In the light of the above distinctions on personal and social identity, the works of Temsula Ao can also be broadly classified under these two categories. Many of her poems reflect the need to assert personal identity, including stories from *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009), her memoir *Once Upon a Life: A Memoir* (2013) and *Aosenla's Story* (2017). For instance, in *Aosenla's Story*, after years of patriarchal society, the personal identity of Aosenla is still in question, “she was no longer her own self; she was the wife of a rich man and a daughter-in-law of an influential family. She no longer had an independent identity.” (*Aosenla* 2) Her prose works *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) and *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014) reflected more on the social identity of the Ao-Nagas. However, one cannot really take apart the personal and social identity because it is the amalgam of both that denotes the identity of a tribe.

Temsula Ao considers identity as “a word loaded with meanings, evocative of multiple interpretations and in today’s context, implicated in a vociferous cry for assertion.” She holds that identity “means different things to different people at different times. It changes significance over the time-space continuum and either accrue or shed meanings all the time” (Ao, *Identity* 6). Here, Temsula Ao has undermined two issues that culture is not static and changes according to changing needs of the people in time and space and the hybrid cultural products do not dehumanize and de-identify the traditional forms, but construct new identities and create new contexts for their sustenance and continuity, thus renewing the folk life of the society. This newly construct identity may be identified to Homi Bhabha’s idea on identity.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha explains how cultural differences may be understood as being based on hybridities created in moments of historical transformation. Hybridity holds the ‘in-between’ space between two

different cultures which consists of the mixture of both the cultures. Hence, Bhabha's theory of hybridity is often employed in the postcolonial discourse to situate the identity/culture of the colonial people. Bhabha sees post-colonial cultures as 'hybrids' identified by their own people as well as the colonial power. Here so, in the case of the Ao-Nagas, their identity may be defined by the hybrid of their old traditional and the new, lying somewhere in the 'in-between' space of its intersection. Within this hybrid space, cultures tend to witness disintegration since the influence of their colonizer's language, dress, politics and cultural attitude slowly replaces their old culture which is termed as mimicry in the postcolonial discourse. This element of mimicry is represented through many of Temsula Ao's characters. For instance, from the short story "The Boy who sold an Airfield" in *Laburnam For my Head*, the young boy named Pokenmong displays a perfect example of mimicry where he spends most of the time with the foreign soldiers aping their lifestyle and adhering to their army routines. "Pokenmong looked at the white man and began to march, shouting, 'left, right, left, right.'" (Ao, *Laburnum* 45) When Pokenmong stayed and started to do all menial work needed in the camp, his presence seem indispensable in the camp, which somehow gave him a new status among the villagers since the villages were still alien to the ways of the camp. Although attached to the camp, Pokenmong is still a tribe, a Naga who blends into the ways of the army camp.

While transition results in a rise of a new class, some elements of tradition have been retained amidst the change. In the story "The Last Song" of *These Hills Called Home*, the girl Apenyo watches her mother weaving colourful shawls which will be sold in the market to bring additional income. The fact that Libeni's shawls are in great demand shows that she is one of the best weavers in the village. Likewise, in the short story "The Pot Maker" from the same collection, we also read about the intricate art of pot making. In the olden times, the Ao women excelled in weaving and pottery. Unlike other societies in India who experience class system, pottery is never considered an inferior occupation among the Ao-Nagas. Art and craft is very important in assigning a distinct identity to the Naga tribe. The story shows that even in modern times, Naga women have not abandoned the art and remain one

of the few traditions that the Ao-Nagas have retained from their old tradition. Moreover, in “The Pot Maker,” Sentila was required to spend the night at the girls’ dormitory *tsuki* the moment she attained puberty, which again is the practice which was followed since the olden times.

In the short story “Death of a Hunter” in *Laburnam for my Head*, Imachanok gains fame as a skilled hunter yet he is also a teacher in the village Lower Primary School. Although his work is to teach the students, he is asked by the Government to hunt down a rogue elephant that has destroyed the farms and has also trampled people to death. Later on, at the success of the expedition Imachok is awarded with handsome cash prize, but he refuses to accept the the gun that was offered to him. The story represents hunting which was an important occupation for the men folk, each hunt challenges “Imchanok as a provider for and protector of his family’s very existence” (Ao, *Laburnam* 33). However, by the end of the story Imchanok has already buried a boar’s tooth from his last hunt and his dismantled gun which signifies the death of the hunter in him. The death of the hunter may also be seen as representing the gradual death of the hunting occupation in a society that seeks to adjust to new ways of thinking about environmental considerations.

The Nagas are also known for their storytelling which is nothing new coming from a rich oral tradition. In fact, many communities in North-East India have, “a vibrant storytelling tradition” which “has continued as the dominant influence on the literary creations from the region” (Misra xvii). Temsula Ao also excels in storytelling and often employs a story within a story. She often employs her characters to narrate a story on her behalf. The storytelling persona makes its first entry in the form of the grandmother in the short story “The Last Song,” followed by Imtisashi in “An Old Man Remembers” both from the collection *These Hills Called Home*. Storytelling is an important form of oral tradition where the knowledge and wisdom of the older generations are passed down from one generation to the other. Here, stories still remain a storehouse of information. This shows that despite the fact that the Ao-Nagas go through transitions, their old tradition of storytelling is among the few which is still retained.

When it comes to retaining old traditions, Temsula Ao is also an advocate in that she has named all her collection of poems ‘songs’ which is a tribute to the oral tradition because poems are songs in oral cultures. Her most recent collection of poem, *Songs from the Other Life*, is significant for the fact that the Ao-Naga oral tradition comes alive in this series of poems on Naga identity. She writes in her poem “The Old-Story Teller,”

Grandfather constantly warned
That forgetting the stories
 Would be catastrophic
 We could lose our history,
Territory, and most certainly
Our intrinsic identity (Ao, *Book of Songs* 241).

Even though *Arju* and *Tsuki* (the learning institutes of boys and girls) no longer exist in today’s Nagaland, Temsula Ao is adamant in preserving the old tradition of storytelling, and she makes it her responsibility to pass it on to younger generations that follow. In this way, she becomes both a practitioner and an educator in preserving the Ao-Naga tradition of storytelling amidst transition.

So I told stories
As my racial responsibility
 To instil in the young
 The art of perpetuating
Existential history and essential tradition
To be passed on to the next generation
(Ao, *Book of Songs* 241).

Similarly, Temsula Ao’s work *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) dedicated to ‘the Stone-People from Lungterok’, shows that the oral tradition of the Aos is the “source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion and history” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* xv). When a culture undergoes transition and when oral tradition is on the verge of being forgotten, to preserve one’s essential identity by re-awakening olden songs and stories, and articulating it into a new discourse is a must. Temsula Ao says

that, “It is only when the Nagas re-embrace and re-write this vision into the fabric of their lives in spite of the compulsions of a fast changing world, can we say that the memories of the turbulent years have served us well.” (Ao, *These Hills* xi)

So far, the issue of Christianity, western education and the British colonization has been discussed as major factors contributing to the process of transition, however it was and still is the political turmoil that amplifies the cultural disintegration among the people. The first factor of cultural disintegration was triggered on the question of their origin (identity) by the foreign teachings. Fuelling the cause, the political underground upheavals since the fifties created traumatic circumstances, self isolation and misery which created a deep-rooted mental unrest among the people. Temsula Ao observes this period when “a form of second-class citizenry was being imposed on the Nagas in the emerging modern set-up” which resulted in “devastating political upheavals escalating into terrible violence since the mid-fifties till date” (Ao, *On Being* 5). The once peaceful hills had then become a warzone of survival of the fittest.

As much as the political conflicts lead to cultural disintegration, one may observe that it also integrates the people in many ways through Naga patriotism. In one of the short story “The Jungle Major” in *These Hills Called Home*, it is found that the whole village participated in this nationalist movement, for the sovereignty of land. “It was after a year or so of Khatila’s marriage that the entire land was caught in the new wave of patriotic fervour that swept the imagination of the people and plunged them into a struggle, which many did not even understand” (Ao, *These Hills* 3). Besides the Christian missionaries and British rulers, the villagers even looked at the Indian army as foreigner powers who came to claim their land. To a Naga, identity is very much affiliated to the possession of his land. And hence, “The subject of independence became public talk; young people spoke of the exploit of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of patriotic warriors to liberate their homeland from foreign rule” (Ao, *These Hills* 3). Here, Temsula Ao engages the notion of nationalism because for the Nagas, nationalism meant setting up an independent Naga country instead of locating themselves as part of the Indian nation. The independence movement gained by the

day and even the remotest villages were involved. Their involvement may be direct by joining the underground army, or indirectly by paying taxes to the underground movement. Similar to the political conflicts as an agent of integration among the people, Imo Lanutemjen Aier also points out how Christianity also integrates the collective Naga tribe. He says that, “the factor of sharing a common and larger religion proved to be cohesive in uniting the various tribes into that of a larger entity,” which “add to their political desire of ethnic distinctiveness” (123). Likewise, education also helps in generating a Naga consciousness and provided a new way of social mobility and non-traditional achievements.

Since the Naga society consists of different tribes, tribal representation is very important in their administration. Clan/tribal inclusion is essential in their nationalistic movement. For instance, in the story “Shadows” from *These Hills Called Home*, the recruitment for the China training mission by the underground was carried out with meticulous care. One of the important criteria was that “tribal representation had to be balanced so that when these men came back from training, they would be able to teach the different units located in their respective tribal areas” (Ao, *These Hills* 70). Hence, even in the times of turbulent violence, tribal integrity was maintained even when the land was plagued with violence.

In “Sonny” in *Laburnum for My Head*, we read that the rural people wanted to eliminate the inequalities and injustices of the repressive occupation forces. What the people wanted was “to return to the utopian state of self-rule before the alien rulers had come and overturned their ancient way of life” (Ao, *Laburnam* 97). This notion of nationalism originated from the motif to claim possession over their land and to reconstruct their tradition. Rakhee Kalita comments, “The story of these people is the story of history’s accidents, of an arbitrary line drawing boundaries across geographically and culturally contiguous lands dismembering the natural and inevitable growth and movement of a community—a consequence of colonial ambitions, political battles and failed bureaucratic strategies” (Kalita 17).

The nationalism movement marked a stark shift in the ideology of the people which is another factor for the transition and cultural disintegration. Since the

struggle for freedom, the people were influenced with a new kind of politics. Initially, the movement revolved between two forces, the underground and the Indian Army. However, the Indian Army often bribed the villagers to conduct certain errands in favour of the army. On the other hand, the underground army would often demand taxes upon the villagers, and failure to meet such demands often resulted in threats or even death. As a result, much confusion arose among the common people because there was uncertainty of who belonged to whom. In the story “Sonny” from *Laburnum for My Head*, the confusion is evident as Sonny entered “a twilight zone in the struggle for freedom where one could not identify the real enemy anymore because the conflict was no longer only of armed resistance against an identifiable adversary. It had now also become an ideological battlefield within the resistance movement itself, posing new dangers from fellow national workers supposedly pursuing a common goal” (Ao, *Laburnam* 91).

What we can draw from this is the change among the Naga people. In the olden days, the Naga people were known to be very loyal to their clan/village because their identity is deeply rooted in the village. Temsula Ao talks about how a Naga banished from his ancestral village for political, social or criminal offences is the greatest humiliation because that would mean he is disaffiliated from his origin and tradition (Ao, *Identity* 1). If that be the case, one is left with a question as to where such kind of ideology exists now because clearly, during the insurgent period, a Naga would often turn against a fellow Naga. For instance, in the case of Satemba in “The Curfew Man” in *These Hills Called Home*, he performs the role of an informer, a person who monitors the villagers and the underground in order to draw information for the Indian Army. Had it been in the olden Naga context, a Naga would never turn his back on his fellow Naga in support of an outsider. However, this has been a common case in time of insurgency. This also reveals that the moral disintegration of the society and the political administration of the old Naga village have disintegrated to the point where one does not respect the integrity of the village anymore. It may be noted here that the cause of cultural disintegration is not always due to external factors like the Christian conversion, the British colonization or the Indian Army.

Other factors such as the power struggle among different factions within the underground forces or village also cause conflicts which are self-inflicted in nature. It was the Shillong Accord of 1975 that led to factionalism among the underground because of their divided opinions. The NSCN, Isak Muivah faction, the Khaplang faction and other groups often kill one another. Factional tensions within the various groups brought about more violence and terror among the villagers as the increase in factional groups meant increase in more tax demands on the villagers. In the story “The Letter” in *Laburnam for my Head*, the poor hardworking village men were robbed by strangers in the name of the underground government. The villagers could not resist them as they were armed with guns and resisting could be fatal.

Such acts of blatant extortion from the so-called ‘national workers’ was not a new thing for the simple villagers. What amazed them was the timing of their arrival and the accuracy of their information (Ao, *Laburnam* 55).

From what we can observe from this is that the threat and violence in the above situation is solely internal, of one Naga to another Naga. A Naga turning against his fellow Naga, in fact, robbing and threatening his fellowman is clearly a sign of moral disintegration among the Nagas. When Temsula Ao states that this is “not a new thing,” it reveals that the villagers have already become accustomed to this harassment. Therefore, the transition from the collective Naga underground group to different factional groups may be seen as creating more tensions in the Naga society which in turn disintegrated the mutual trust of families, neighbours, in fact, the whole community. Moreover, the story “The Letter” further throws light on how the practice of collecting tax can be misused by the underground for their selfish personal satisfaction by “using the money to feed their drug or drinking habits” (Ao, *Laburnam* 57).

Since the attainment of statehood in 1963, Nagaland has witnessed various transformations in terms of development viz. new roads and bridges, schools, offices and public infrastructures, electricity, telecommunications etc. Today, the economic transition is marked by the shift in occupation in the form of various trades in the society and under the Government as well. The transformation from the barter

system of the traditional Naga society to monetization gradually lessened the traditional activity of cultivation. Money became an important factor in determining the economic stability of the people. Money is seen as the ultimate mode of power, of self sustainability which has its own merits and demerits. The livelihood of the urban and the rural widens, and it became very difficult for traditional occupations like weaving, pottery or any other household skills to compete with the government jobs. This further creates a gap between the village and town. The growing division among the people and the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots has been described in one of Temsula Ao's poem called "A Strange Place",

This is a place where
 A Berlin wall divides
 The haves and the have-nots
 Into tribal enclaves
 With skyscrapers and slums
 Co-existing
 In incongruous proximity
 Each insulated
 Against the other
 By self-imposed exile.
 The one from choice and the other by force
 Of sheer existence (Ao, *Books of Songs* 14).

Moreover, the absence of adequate economic infrastructure has fostered unemployment in the society. In the process, poverty became one of the problems in Nagaland. Hence, poverty in this light may be seen as a contributing factor which brought about cultural disintegration especially in the modern times.

Today, the Nagas, particularly the youth, are well connected with global popular culture through visual media, newspapers and the internet. As such, Nagaland too has faced different kinds of problems brought on by globalization such as corruption, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure etc. The impact of modernization appears to have created a desperate and mediocre Naga society. This

is what Henry Balfour, an anthropologist and the first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, said in 1923 after his brief visit to the British colonized Naga Hills, “We must always bear in mind that tampering with long-established and deeply-rooted customs is apt to be dangerous, and although the ideal aimed at may be perfectly sound from our point of view, the metamorphic results arrived at may prove disappointment and very different to those which theory leads us to expect” (qtd. in Oppitz et.al. 60). In this case Balfour has been prophetic in his analysis. Words such as “dangerous” and “disappointing” are the reality for the present 21st century Nagas. Today, the people of Nagaland are overwhelmed with western ideas, images, and concepts of the globalized world which holds great impact to their way of thinking.

According to Temsula Ao, the most damaging blow of modernization amongst the Nagas was the instilling of the deep-seated notion in them that their culture was primitive, uncivilized, and immoral. It is ironic that both the British colonizers and the missionaries were in conflict about how to deal with the Nagas. Balfour puts this conflict into perspective: “In endeavouring to promote culture-metamorphosis, if our conscientious aim is to raise the savage to a higher level, we should try to achieve our objective by evolution, not by revolution” (Balfour 16). The overriding attitude was that the Nagas were primitive and their culture needed to be scrapped and replaced. This attitude seem to be successfully ingrained in the mindset of the Nagas themselves, as Von Stockhausen observes in his article that, “almost every conversation [among the young Nagas] about their grandfather’s culture contains at some point the sad and unconsidered words, ‘we are very backward,’ which brings them full circle back to the ever-present mindset of European evolutionism” (74). The understanding that Nagas’ culture was primitive and backward has left the Nagas constantly in pursuit of Western culture. In other words, the Nagas were left with a great cultural vacuum that needed to be filled, which the missionaries filled with their own culture. This transition through modernization has resulted in a mass cultural disintegration where a rootless society was manufactured.

On a different note, one may question as to why transition led to cultural disintegration among the Nagas, whereas for some other cultures, transition helps in

sustainability of a culture, not disintegration. Here, in the case of the Nagas, while adopting various changes, the people gradually lost their own cultural patterns and heritage. Believing that wearing Western clothes makes one modern is a flawed concept. For the Nagas, there seem to be much confusion between westernization and modernization.

Modernisation can be understood as the process by which a country moves from a traditional agrarian society to having a more secular urbanised society and in the process it remoulds the cultural system into a new mode. On the other hand, Westernisation would mean that a certain indigenous cultural element is replaced by the Western culture, and the functional role of the former is taken over by the latter. In Westernisation there is no newness or innovation because individuals only tend to follow the ways or archetypes that are already prescribed by the Western culture. However, Modernisation is advancement towards betterment and moving forward with positive results. In the light of the above distinction, a Naga can be modern while preserving his Naga culture. Traditions do blend into modernity, if they want to do so. If the collective mindset of the present Naga could be replaced with this notion, much of the problems of cultural disintegration may be resolved. This would require changes not only at the institutional level but also a fundamental change at the personal level. It involves a change in modes of thinking, beliefs, opinions, attitudes and actions. Temsula Ao writes:

The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people (Ao, *Identity 7*).

Temsula Ao's fear of reducing her tribe's identity is evident in the above lines. This fear may have been triggered by the encounters which the writer might have in various walks of her life. For instance, in one of her poems "Heritage," published by Muse India, Temsula Ao describes her shocking encounter at a museum in Europe,

a never-before-seen
gorgeous body-cloth
of glorious colours
reposing
inside a glass cage.
...
As if pulled by a mystic thread
I draw closer and read the label
that proclaims this marvel
to have come from my tribe!
I stand there stunned
with the silent anguish
of the truly dis-possessed
and mortified that
I had to traverse the skies
to have a first glimpse
of what is essentially mine
(Ao, "Heritage," *Muse India*).

Temsula Ao is shocked by the display of something which clearly belongs to her own tribe i.e. the Ao-Naga tribe. Here, she is provoked by the fact that her own identity has become a mere display at the museum as becoming "mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance," which she has feared for the Ao-Naga identity and also the identity of the other Northeast tribes as well.

The Ao-Naga identity has come a long way from the oral tradition to the contemporary times. Although the focus of the thesis is on the Ao-Naga identity, the

collective Naga identity is frequently addressed in the course of study because the historical facts and external encounters are similar if not the same, when the study traces the factors affecting transition among the Nagas, it encompasses the different tribes and sub-tribes of Nagaland besides the Ao-Naga tribe. Temsula Ao has woven into her poems and short stories the crucial elements of transitions and the factors which contributed change among the Ao-Nagas. The change from which the Ao-Naga identity is studied in this thesis is grounded on the accounts given in Temsula Ao's book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*. In the course of the above observations made from the works of Temsula Ao and other references, factors contributing to the cause of transition among the Ao-Naga tribe may be identified by both external and internal agents. The external agent is identified by the coming of the Christianity missionaries with their new belief systems, introduction to western education, British colonization, and imposition of Indian administrative and political control over the people with India's independence, all of which exert colonial cultural influence among the Ao-Nagas which is further enhanced by Westernization and Modernization. The external agent of transition goes parallel with internal agents such as the growing westernization and modernization, the breakdown of tribal communal spirit due to relocation, new occupations and continuing factionalism among the Naga nationalists. All these factors of transitions, both external and internal, affected the culture of the Ao-Nagas on a larger scale which eventually led to disintegration. The process of change, transition and cultural disintegration studied in this chapter is a crucial factor in re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity as it traces the shift from the old way of life to the modern times wherein the people have to adapt to different life situations. The adaptation to such situations drive the Ao-Nagas further away from their own roots, and as such, their culture is exposed to a new construct consisting of a hybrid of two divergent cultures.

Tilottama Misra remarks that, "clash of cultures has often led to the loss of traditional forms and the adoption of new cultural icons that threaten the existing ones" (Misra xi). Likewise, Temsula Ao also shares the same viewpoint as Tilottama Misra because she sees that the cultural disintegration caused by transition manifests a threat to the existing Ao-Naga identity prior to the pre-colonial times. The

construction of the Ao-Naga identity today as seen from the perspective of Temsula Ao in her works seems superficial and peripheral. According to her, the concept on the Ao-Naga identity may be settled if the new generation would return to the base of their traditional Naga way of life. She further writes,

It is only when the Nagas re-embraced and re-write this vision into the fabric of their lives in spite of the compulsions of the fast changing world, can we say that the memories of the turbulent years have served us well (Ao, *These Hills* xi).

When the Nagas realized that most of their old tradition has been lost in the process of transition and that in losing their tradition they are losing their old identity, the need to re-visit their roots has become a great concern among the collective Nagas particularly in the present times. The need to settle this cultural ambivalence has been the core element of Temsula Ao's writings which have stemmed out from years of colonial oppression. The root of this concern may be traced back to the Indian Independence when the Nagas developed a nationalist notion and their fight to retain the Naga sovereignty. The nationalist movement however led to insurgency where terror and violence permeated the entire land since the early 1950s till the present. As such, violence and terror has been a recurrent theme in many of the literature sprouting from the North-East region to which Temsula Ao is no exception. The cultural disintegration of the Naga society continues under the reign of violence. The following third chapter of this thesis titled "Violence and 'Benevolent Subordination'" will further delve into the subject of violence and its impact on the people, which in the long run determine the identity of the Ao-Naga people. It will also study the impact of 'benevolent subordination,' a term used by Temsula Ao in one of the essays from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014).

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CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE AND 'BENEVOLENT SUBORDINATION'

The process of transition and cultural disintegration among the Ao-Naga tribe has continued under the reign of violence due to the political turmoil of Nagaland since the 1950s. The political unrest was triggered by the shift of power from the colonial rule to the Indian administration. When India got its independence in 1947, the Naga Hills remained under the Assam province. Around this time, the Naga National Council was formed in 1946 which demanded Naga sovereignty. The denial for a sovereign country on the part of the Indian administration stirred up the nationalist movement among the Nagas which resulted in violence leading to further cultural disintegration among the people. The consequences of violence and its impact on the people are immeasurable and hence this chapter will study violence as a determining factor in re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity. The timeframe on the study of violence among the Nagas is situated between the outbreak of the nationalist movement i.e the 1950s up to the present time. This chapter will also look into the idea of benevolent subordination encountered by the people amidst the prevalence of terror and violence in the society, as witnessed in the works of Temsula Ao.

In the context of the thesis, violence may be understood as the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage or destroy. There can be different variants of violence such as political, sexual/gender, religious, mental or domestic violence. The World Health Organization defines violence as, "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (4). According to Amartya Sen, "violence is fomented by the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror" (Sen 2).

In almost all situations of violence, it is the dominant power which exercises its physical force or power over the subordinate. Hence, the subordinates become direct victims and sufferers to violence. However, the subordination of these victims

do not always involve violence to its extremity, and may in fact entail a striking benevolence on the part of the oppressor or dominant power. ‘Benevolent Subordination’ is one of the essays from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014), where Temsula Ao says that women in Naga society are still regarded as being subordinated to men in almost all the important decision-making institutions in society, and yet this subordination comes with benevolence on the superior male gender. Borrowing this idea of ‘benevolent subordination’, this chapter will also study the various levels of subordination which the Nagas are subjected to, viz. the subordination of the women to men, the subordination of the Naga people to the colonial rulers and the subordination to the Indian administration, and how certain benevolence affect subordinate performances.

Violence has been a recurring theme in literature. The social issues of violence have been reflected in literature in many eminent works over the years. The literature from Northeast India is no exception from the rest of the world. Literature from this region abounds in tales of the troubled political scenario, violence, backwardness, under development and poverty, these have often been the case for regions undergoing transition and cultural disintegration. Literature from the Northeast is unfortunately, popular mostly in the representation of the various political problems and violence that are distinctive to the Northeast situation to which Temsula Ao is no exception. The reconstruction of a legitimate and autonomous identity has been a common drive for the people in the Northeast. Pramathesh Deka writes,

“The people of the North-East India have gone through a long history of negligence in their demand for economic and infrastructural development, denial of representation in the great Indian civilization discourse, betrayal in terms of political equality, marginalization of the local people by the continuing migration of people from outside” (165).

Insurgency and counter-insurgencies have had a heavy toll in the region which have kindled a sense of “ethno-nationalism, political isolation and psychological alienation” (Goswami 271) from mainland India. Many contemporary

writers of the Northeast like *Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih*, *Robin S. Ngangom*, *Easterine Kire*, *Monalisa Changkija*, *Tilottoma Misra* and *Temsula Ao*, among others, have expressed the various political problems and violence that are typical to the Northeast situation. *Manash Pratim Borah* says that “literature written in this region is a camouflaged representation in fictional form of social reality representing typical Northeastern socio-political experiences and violence along with strong social commentaries of socially committed writers” (Borah 15). Although the Northeast comprises of different tribes and cultures, one may observe a kind of homogeneity in its representation of violence in the midst of apparent heterogeneity. Commenting on the writings from Northeast and its incorporation of the theme of violence, *Tilottoma Misra* also writes, “Violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be a never-ending one in this region and yet people have not learnt ‘to live with it’, as they are expected to do by the distant centres of power” (xix).

With violence being the recurrent scenario in the region, the people suffer from emotional fear and terror. Writers from different regions of the Northeast India have incorporated this fear and terror into their literary discourse. *Cherrie L. Chhangte* from Mizoram writes on terror lore in her essay “Loneliness in the Midst of Curfew,”

Terror Lore is particularly apt when applied to the north eastern states of India, where such struggles constitute part of each of their very recent histories, and where, as a result, stories, songs and various lores have emerged, reflecting the experiences of entire generations of people who have grown up under the shadow of such terror. This fear, in most cases may be a consequence of the reign of terror inflicted upon a nation or society by the dominant political group or a militant group fighting for various causes, with violence being the main force behind their actions in both cases (237-238).

As such, terror has also found its place in the writings of *Temsula Ao*. In the poem “New Terror,” *Temsula Ao* describes the new terror that invaded the land that preyed on beast and man alike. She also depicts the helpless situation of the people

who by then had “no wisdom to offer to counter the new terror riding on streaked lightning” (Ao, *Book of Songs* 232).

But now the new enemy
Comes from nowhere
Moves like lightning
And kills at will (231).

The new terror referred by Temsula Ao in this poem may be identified as the armed militants dressed in their camouflaged uniform who roamed the forest killing whoever or whatever crossed their path.

The new denizens dressed like trees
Now infest the terrain
They swagger in these newfound heavens
Of unspecified dreams.

And armed with sceptres
Of their unidentified kingdoms,
They dispense death and desolation (Ao, *Book of Songs* 233).

The above poem captures the point delivered by Cherrie L. Chhange on how the people of the Northeast have encountered such terror amidst the violence inflicted by various militant groups. What we can draw from such situations is that there is nothing positive that comes out of violence. Violence only results in “death and desolation” and the violent actions of the militants only prove to be detrimental to the people or the society at large in every ways.

The socio-political scenario in Nagaland since the 1950s has been a violent and troubled period for the people. Prior to that, Nagaland had witnessed various battles and intertribal wars in its history. The Naga tribes were often raided by the neighbouring tribes. The invaders came to seek wealth and captives from these tribal ethnic groups. It is perhaps due to these experiences that the Naga tribes are known for their bravery and head hunting experiences. However, these battles and intertribal

wars do not compare to the violence and bloodshed witnessed during the political unrest that falls within the timeframe of this study.

Amartya Sen has written that, “a strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups” (1-2). This may explain the hostility shown by the Nagas towards the British colonizers and later on towards the new Indian government. The political conflict and violence that besieged Nagaland ever since has resulted in exploitation and deprivation that led to despairing subordination on the part of the tribal community. The description of human life and human conditions in the works of Temsula Ao in the backdrop of the region’s political unrest will be studied, and how these factors have contributed to the re-imagining of the Ao-Naga identity. Again, one may note that the political unrest within the region is not specific to the Ao-Naga tribe alone, but encompasses the entire Naga community. As such, the Ao-Nagas cannot be taken in isolation in this study because the history of Nagaland as a whole witnessed overlapping or merging of the tribal identities. Therefore, in re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity amidst the prevailing violence and subjugation, the study will also trace the collective Naga identity wherein the term Ao-Nagas may be flexible to also encompass Nagas in general.

The recurring theme of violence in the works of Temsula Ao is best seen in her collection of short stories. Underneath the recurrent theme of violence, we detect and observe the existence and the workings of power. Violence and power are inter-related and explores the complex ways in which violence in the narrative is intrinsically woven with the system of power relations. The existence of power in many of Temsula Ao’s narrative may align with the views of Foucault when he writes, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 93). Almost in all the short stories we find the presence of power exerted upon the common people by the Indian Army. However, this power is challenged by the nationalist group, i.e. the underground who are motivated by the dream of an autonomous identity. The power struggle between the army and the underground echoes the famous passage by Foucault concerning the relation between

power and resistance, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). This power resistance often results in violence because violence seems to be the fastest way to snatch power from the ruling party even though it is not the only means.

The Naga movement resembles the actions of Che Guevara, the Argentine Marxist revolutionary who wanted to overthrow the external power imposed upon them by all means. The motivational drive resembles that of Che Guevara, “Power is not an apple that falls from a tree into your lap. Power has to be snatched from people who already have it.” When the Nagas felt their inferiority against the dominant power, they took to arms. C. Wright Mills points out that “All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence” (Qtd. in Arendt 35). From what we can draw from the above lines, violence is often generated either deliberately or unconsciously when two parties fight over power. In other words, violence results when two parties do not identify with one another. Hence, the question on identity becomes an important factor which often prompts conflict between two different parties. This identity conflict is not just exclusive to the Nagas but also to different tribes/communities of the world. Amartya Sen has written, “The cultivation of violence associated with identity conflicts seems to repeat itself around the world with increasing persistence” (3). He also states how the “fury of the dichotomized identities” are often ready to “inflict hateful penalties on the other side” (3), in other words, violence.

Hence, power may be seen as a relationship between parties in which one affects another's actions. However, power differs from force or violence, which affects the body physically. According to Foucault, power is present in all human relationships, and penetrates throughout society. The state does not have a monopoly over power, because power relations are deeply unstable and changeable. The presence of power does not necessarily confirm the presence of violence because according to Foucault, power is omnipresent “not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from

one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation between one point to another” (Foucault 93). For Foucault, power is dispersed and pervasive rather than dominating, power lies in the acquisition of knowledge and “in itself the exercise of power is not violence” (Foucault 1982, 220). When Foucault says that power is omnipresent, one may observe the presence of power structure in the old Naga society. The power structure within the society may be identified through the *Putu Menden* (village government) wherein its power did not necessarily inflict violence over its people. Temsula Ao has mentioned in her book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) on how the *Putu Menden* “enjoys a wide range of powers concerning the running of village affairs “ and how it “is entrusted with a variety of duties” (35). It may be noted here that the power exercised by the *Putu Menden* only ensures the smooth running of the affairs of the village. In this light, the Naga society may be seen as an example of Foucault’s argument when he says that the exercise of power in itself does not always end up in violence.

Sharing the same views, Hanna Arendt, an American philosopher, observes that power is much more pervasive and complex than force or authority. In her essay “Communicative Power” she writes,

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears when power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance (Arendt 71).

In the case of the Nagas, the shift from the *Putu Menden* to the British colonizers and then to the Indian marks the instability of power structure among the Nagas. When the power of the *Putu Menden* was jeopardized by a new kind of power structure, it resulted in violence as a means of resistance of one power force against another.

The statement also reiterates another observation on the subject of power and violence: “Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power” (Arendt 69). For instance, in the case of

Nagaland, violence and conflict between the Indian Army and the underground forces did not help to enhance their power, but rather diminish their power from both sides. When it comes to the clash of power between the government and the underground, the most conspicuous effect is the unleashing of violence from both sides, which in turn affects the lives of the common people. In the short stories of Temsula Ao, violence is the common factor threading the stories together. The presence of violence in any struggle aimed at political independence and which challenges the power of the state is met with resistance and violence.

Resistance, which is essentially a counter-action to the established agent of power, calls for more application of force, thereby fuelling greater violent action from the other side. This has been the case in Nagaland too. However, amidst this unending self feeding cycle of violence, it is the common man who is at the receiving end who has to suffer the consequences. Till today, in Nagaland, the political conflict remains unsolved. Even though the state got its statehood in 1963, insurgency remains, this act of insurgency confirms Arendt's conclusion that violence "can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it."

In order to trace the root of violence in the region, the study requires an overview of the history and political background of Nagaland. Nagaland remained a part of the state of Assam after the independence of India in 1947. Nationalist activities arose demanding a political union of their ancestral and native groups. The movement led to a series of violent incidents that damaged government and civil infrastructure, attacked government officials and civilians as well. Esterine Kire in *Bitter Wormwood* (2011) accounts some important dates of 'Naga Political History' in "Appendix I" (244-247) which chronicles the crucial years in the Naga political history. As noted in the Appendix, a Nine-Point agreement known as the Hydari Commission was made by Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam in 1947 which provided legislative, judicial and executive powers and protection of lands and resources of the Nagas. However this was rejected by the Constituent Assembly. In 1951, the Naga Plebiscite was signed by 99 percent of Nagas for Naga sovereignty and was sent to the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru, which was also

ignored. As a result, the NNC boycotted the First Indian General Elections in Naga Hills where there were no Naga candidates or voters in the election. In 1953, Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act was passed sanctioning arrest warrants, imposition of fines, and proscribing of public speeches and meetings. This was followed by the declaration of Naga Hills as a disturbed area in January 1956 (Kire 245-246). The nationalist Naga movement then continued in the years to follow, unabated.

By 1964, cease-fire was negotiated between the Indian army and the Underground followed by peace talks which did not end well. In 1975, the Shillong Accord was signed between representatives of the Underground organisation and the Indian government stating that the Nagas would accept the Indian constitution. However, this created great discord among the Naga underground which eventually led to factionalism. Factions under the leadership of Isak Chishi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang were formed. The negotiations on cease-fire and peace talks continued on and off. In February 2008, Forum for Naga Reconciliation headed by Dr. Wati Aier was formed, and as recent as 2009, “Declaration of Commitment” was signed by the Underground groups at the Joint Working Camp for Naga reconciliation. These important events as noted by Easterine Kire holds an important ground in studying the violence that besieged the land. The insights into the historical background of Naga political history enables one to have a deeper understanding of Temsula Ao, as her stories and its portrayal of violence parallel the historical events.

The violence undergone by the Naga people has been written about and documented by various writers from the region and colonial anthropologists. However, in the “Authors Introduction” to her book *Bitter Wormwood*, Easterine Kire states that such issues of violence regarding the account of the Naga national movement against India has been “cleverly concealed by censorship on newspaper reports” except for one western journalist named Gavin Young (*The Daily Telegraph*) who entered Nagaland illegally in the 1960s to “report what he saw of the genocide and rape and torture of the Nagas by the Indian Army” (1). The works of Temsula Ao, especially her short stories, portray the graphic description of violence

in the region pertaining to the time of insurgency and after. The stories describe how the Nagas cope with violence, how they negotiate power and force and how they seek spaces and enjoyment in the midst of terror. Since Temsula Ao has been a witness to such kind of violence, her experience has been reflected in many of her works. Set in the initial turbulent decades of the Naga insurgency, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) is inspired by the political turmoil that has ravaged the land since the early fifties of the 20th century, the collection consists of ten short stories each of which depicts a narration of violence of their own kind, conflicts where there are really no winners but the victims are left physically and mentally tormented. The other volume *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009) consists of eight stories which deal more with the ordinary events in the life of the Nagas rather than the scarring memories of the turbulent period of violence except for the story “Sonny.” These short stories which capture the recurrent violence and terror will be dealt with more in this chapter, especially the collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* as these stories entail the rampant violence that swept the region. The title of the collection itself suggests that the stories are indeed ‘Stories from a War Zone.’

In the short stories of *These Hills Called Home*, Temsula Ao gives a vivid account of the disturbances and graphic image of violence in Nagaland. In “The Jungle Major,” Temsula Ao talks about the kind of violence that is inflicted on the villagers by the Indian Army. The new wave of patriotic fervour among the tribe recruited many men from the villages to join the underground army of freedom fighters in the forest. In fighting against this movement, the Indian Army often turned on the villagers which they suspect are where the underground leaders belonged to. The story reveals how the Indian army uses stringent measures to stop this movement, ransacking of houses by security forces, burning of grains in barns, herding people into camps away from their villages were a common phenomenon. One of the greatest fears of the Nagas was the grouping of villages. Temsula Ao mentions in her story that the grouping of villages is what the Nagas “hated and dreaded even more than bullets” (Ao, *These Hills* 3). This tactic of grouping within zones is a common practice during periods of emergency or violent resistance

because it makes it more convenient for the security forces to guard and monitor them day and night. People who lost their ancestral homeland were forced to reside in unfamiliar environment and meted out intense physical and mental torture. It was not a new thing if a woman happened to be molested by the security forces, and if they suspect that any villager withheld information they would be severely beaten. The violence took place unabated as Temsula Ao writes, “sometimes they would be hung upside down and subjected to unspeakable tortures like chilli powder being rammed into their extremities” (3). Here in the story, violence is enacted between two parties, the Indian Army and the underground force, and the villagers become the direct victims of this violent conflict. For instance, Khatila, the wife of Punaba in “The Jungle Major” in *These Hills Called Home*, was threatened by the Indian army and questioned about the whereabouts of her husband. “We know how to deal with women like you” (4) is the kind of threat which the women live with during that time. However, violence has not always been between the Indian Army and the underground force only.

In the case of the tragic death of Soaba in the short story “Soaba” in *These Hills Called Home*, he remains the victim of violence because he was the underdog of the society, within the household of Boss’ kingdom. The unfortunate story of Soaba, the name which means ‘idiot’ in the Ao language, exhibits the various hardships during “the wave of dissidence and open rebellion” (Ao, *These Hills* 10) in the land. The fact that Soaba was able to speak only simple sentences like, ‘I am hungry,’ ‘Give me more’ and ‘No, don’t do that’ reveal that he must have had a hard life.

During the troubled times, different political groups were formed, especially the one known as the “flying squad” where rebels were outfitted with vehicles and guns and given “free rations of rum to boot” (12). It is in this privileged image that Imlichuba, popularly known as ‘Boss,’ harasses the general public. The tragic death of Soaba in the hands of Boss shows that violence is not always political. This kind of violence may be claimed under domestic violence, however the fault was never triggered by the victim. Temsula Ao comments, he “had strayed out of his natural

habitat into a maze that simply swallowed him up” (Ao, *These Hills* 21). The death of Soaba shows how innocent Naga people succumbed to the state-sponsored violence.

One may question whether there could have been a way to avoid his death? Of course, Boss’s wife Imtila was there to defend him, but it was not enough. One may question as to why the innocent Soaba and Imtila would be part of that household where their lives were under a constant threat? Soaba could have ran away, and Imtila could have divorced the hideous character. However, even though they were victims of the constant harassment of Boss, Boss did provide for their needs, for instance a place to stay, sleep and food to eat. This is where the term ‘benevolent subordination’ can be applied. In her essay, “Benevolent Subordination” from *On Being a Naga: Essays*, Temsula Ao argues that the Nagas are a patriarchal society where the women have always been subordinated to men because it is only men who can be decision-makers in important matters both in private and public affairs. She also provided two prominent reasons for women accepting this subordination to men due to very practical reasons, “physical security” and “economic exclusivity” (Ao, *On Being* 49) because all landed property belonged to the male. Therefore, in the case of Imtila, she was bound to witness the household violence because there seemed to be no other alternatives during that time.

Within the narration of the story “Soaba” in *These Hills Called Home*, Temsula Ao has also written on how new vocabularies were acquired into the everyday language of the people such as convoy, grouping, curfew and situation. While the word ‘situation’ may seem perfectly innocent, in the context of the underground movement it referred “to the fall out of the struggle between two opposing forces” (Ao, *These Hills* 11). Therefore, these words encapsulated the terror and sufferings of the Naga people. Moreover, Temsula Ao comments on the topic of village grouping which holds total negativity for the Nagas. She writes, “It was the most humiliating insult that was inflicted on the Naga psyche by forcibly uprooting them from the soil of their origin and being, and confining them in an alien environment, denying them access to their fields, restricting them from their routine

activities” (Ao, *These Hills* 11). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the identity of the Nagas were deeply rooted to their ancestral land, moreover, an important factor observed here is that “the freedom they enjoyed could so easily be robbed at gunpoint by the invading army” (11). This is yet again another example of forced military power over the people.

The most outrageous of Temsula Ao’s account on violence would be from the story, “The Last Song” in *These Hills Called Home* where a mother and daughter were gang raped and killed by the Indian Army. Libeni and Apenyo were victims to the unfortunate situation. Miazi Hazam points out that this story is “possibly the worst atrocity that has been fictionalised by the author having occurred during the days of the so-called freedom movement for an independent Naga State” (Hazam 20-21). Because of the Independence movement, their village was also compelled to pay tax to the underground movement. The government forces on the other hand take violent action on the villagers accused of supporting the rebels. Here, the innocent villagers are sandwiched between the forces of the government and of the underground. The villagers were very much aware of the consequences of either paying or not paying taxes to the underground. If they did not do so, the underground would raid their village or taunt them. At the same time, the Indian army turned onto the village with utmost brutality and harassment. It was indeed a difficult situation for the villagers as they were subordinate to both warring sides.

For the unfortunate mother and daughter, there was nothing they could do to avoid the violent situation, their very existence were suppressed in all ways. Their horrific death symbolises the height of the violence enacted by the Indian army upon the common people. Adding to that, the incident took place inside the church, a place considered to be holy by the Christian faith. Thus the Indian army had not only committed rape and murder, but they had also violated the sanctity of a religious site as well. Temsula Ao continues to write, “But the savagery was not over yet. Seeing that it would be a waste of time and bullets to kill off all witnesses inside the church, the order was given to set it on fire” (Ao, *These Hills* 29). This violent incident makes the story one of the most sensitive portrayals of human degradation. Here,

Temsula Ao also portrays the vast difference among human beings. While we see the love, understanding and mutual care among the villagers, we also see a group of inhuman beings acting according to their self interest. The villagers were unable to raise their voice because their power was no match for the Indian Army, they knew that to raise a voice would also cause them their lives. This incident proves that power is an important element when it comes to violence. The violence perpetrated by both the Indian Army and the underground was never challenged by the common people because the villagers were in no position to question the power that was imposed upon them. It was ironic that the Indian army who were expected to be protectors of the people in fact played the role of tormentor adding to the agony and suffering of the people. It may be noted here that, although some of the characters play an active role in the power-struggle and become either collaborators or join sides, there are other characters, given a choice, who would prefer to stay away from any other involvement. However, the irony lies in the fact that no one could evade the political turmoil that permeated every strata of the Naga society. The death of characters such as Soaba, Apenyo and her mother Libeni show how innocent Naga people succumbed to violence. Temsula Ao captures in her poem titled "If" the plight of the innocent people who were continuously threatened and mentally wounded by such violence,

If a wound could speak,
 What language would it use?
 What justice would it seek?
 Whom would it blame?

The aggressor
 For being strong
 Or the victim
 For being weak? (Ao, *Book of Songs* 130)

The first stanza of this poem highlights the helplessness of the innocent people who were silenced and over-powered by the Indian army. The very word 'if' denotes uncertainty and hesitation to even speak out the condition of the trauma

undergone by the people. The question asked in the second stanza is not one that seeks answer but acts as an exaggeration to highlight the inarticulate status of the victims.

Often a time, in literary studies, stories of violence have been reduced to mere sensation and sometimes even reduced to one of the many agents to evoke the reader's pleasure. Miller and Tougaw state that, "Narratives of illness, sexual abuse, torture or the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventure as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion" (2). However, in the case of Temsula Ao, she has been witness to the terror stricken violence that came with the insurgent movement in Nagaland. Her personal experience of violence plays an integral part in her narratives. As a writer who was also among the sufferers of the political turmoil, the presence of the theme of violence in her works is obvious and to reduce her work to mere thrill and emotions as stated by Miller and Tougaw would be wrong. Her representation of violence is often straightforward and factual. Temsula Ao has delved into the theme of violence in her work because she wants to acknowledge the consequences of violence on her people, her intention is never to draw sympathy nor false emotions from her readers, but to retell the story so that in doing so, the readers could understand the impact of violence on the lives of the people during that time, and more so, the recognition that they deserve.

In the short story "The Curfew Man" in *These Hills Called Home*, Temsula Ao presents the difficult situation of people living under constant anxiety under the shadow of violence from both the insurgents and security personnel. Curfew was a method adopted by the Indian army in order to keep the rebels away from the village and also to keep the situation under control. During such curfews, no one was allowed to leave their houses at night. Hence, all social activities such as church activities and social gatherings ceased. Curfew can be a problem especially in times of emergency when somebody dies in the village or people fall sick. In such emergencies when one had to go out, they would be stopped, abused or threatened, "there were several incidents where civilians were shot dead by the patrol parties

after curfew and their deaths reported as those of underground rebels killed in ‘encounters’ with the army” (Ao, *These Hills* 34). For the civilians, the threat was not one-sided but comes from both forces, the army and underground. In the story, Temsula Ao talks of two warring armies, “the one overground labelling the other as rebels fighting against the state and the other, operating from their underground hide-outs and calling the Indian army illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories” (Ao, *These Hills* 34). Both the Naga underground and the Indian army blame each other of violating the other and being the cause of violence in the region.

Parallel to the overground army and the underground rebels were two other groups: the informers who were paid to gather information and the sympathizers who helped the underground organisation. Human rights and privacy of the people were violated as government informers monitored the movements and conversations of families whose relatives are suspected to have joined underground groups. There were even cases when the government agencies forced a person to work for them, either by paying them or by threatening them. Thus, the people were being forced to work undercover by choice or by compulsion. These informers were also referred to as *gaonburah*. In the short story “The Night” from *These Hills Called Home*, Imnala’s lover Alemba became one of such *gaonburah*. Temsula Ao further writes about the plight of the *gaonburah* in the short story “A Simple Question” in *Laburnam for my Head*,

Though the *gaonburahs* were supposed to inform the government about the activities of the rebels, they were under tremendous pressure from the underground forces because every move they made was monitored from close quarters. There were instances when certain elders suspected of being ‘with’ the government had been summarily executed. For the *gaonburahs* it was an extremely untenable situation (Ao, *Laburnam* 82).

Like the *gaonburahs*, the common people have to face the same pressure from the underground because they were forced to pay tax on the pretext of donation or any other supply which the underground demanded. For instance, a fixed amount of money would be collected from every household. Failure or refusal to meet such

demands would result in violent beatings or even death. Hence, the common people have to mete out these demands not necessarily because they support the movement, but out of sheer fear of the impending violence that could besiege them. As such, the characters in the stories had to live in fear. Imdongla in the story “A Simple Question” rightfully asks, “How would you feel if your fathers were punished for acting out of fear? Fear of you Indian soldiers and fear of the mongrels of the jungle?” (Ao, *Laburnam* 87)

In the course of insurgency, the power struggle as already pointed out, was not only between the Indian army and the underground, but also within the underground factions. In “Sonny”, Temsula Ao presents how people in Nagaland lived in uncertainty and mutual distrust amidst the underground, supporters of the underground, police informers, double-cross agents and security personnel. It shows how the cravings for power and position inside an insurgent faction lead towards the cold blooded and brutal murder of a rebel with high ideals. There is a sense of subdued anxiety and mutual betrayal in the midst of which no person can live a peaceful life. In such situations Temsula Ao writes,

One could not identify the real enemy anymore because the conflict was no longer only of armed resistance against an identifiable adversary. It had now also become an ideological battlefield within the resistance movement itself, posing new dangers from fellow national workers supposedly pursuing a common goal (Ao, *Laburnam* 91).

Factionalism among the underground brought about more violence and terror among the people. Such kinds of internal factional conflicts may also be observed in another story “Shadows.” In the story, Temsula Ao shows how dissension and hatred among the members of a particular insurgent group lead to brutal killings. Imli, a college student becomes part of the underground Naga Army and was going to China for training. Hoito, the leader of the group going to China had a grudge against Imli’s father who was the second highest boss in the headquarters. Hoito was troubled by Imli’s presence in the group and planned his death. The way an innocent boy had to face death in the story clearly sends a strong signal from Temsula Ao that violence

begets violence. The story is also an indication of how the ‘movement’, which started with great enthusiasm and idealism was later caught in an inner struggle for power, a fact which Temsula Ao mentions in her preface “Lest We Forget” in *These Hills Called Home*:

Nagaland’s story of the struggle for self-determination started with idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment because it became the very thing it sought to overcome (x).

The struggle for power in “Shadows” within the rebel camp led to violence where the son of the Chief-in-Command is treacherously killed by the Second-in-Command because he feels the young boy to be a threat to his own rise in power. Temsula Ao explains that there was “factional tensions within the various groups due to ideological differences” (Ao, *Laburnam* 92).

In “An Old Man Remembers”, Temsula Ao speaks about the old man Sashi and all their friends and relatives, how the prime of their youth consisted of an endless cycle of beatings, rapes, burning of villages, forced labour and running from one hideout to another in the deep jungles to escape the pursuing soldiers, young boys were turned into men who survived to fight these forces, many losing their lives in the process and many becoming ruthless killers themselves. Old man Sashi resolved to tell his grandson how his generation had lost their youth to the dream of nationhood and how that period of history was written with the blood and tears of countless innocents. Their dream to escape and go back to their families kept them going only to be shattered.

Although the above stories are fictional stories written by Temsula Ao, and may not be interpreted as actual historical records, but what we see in the stories are reflections of what happened in Nagaland since the 1950s. Her short stories record the history of Naga people bringing out issues on how insurgency caused tragedy, trauma and upheavals in the society, for the tribe and for the family. Her stories document the acts of violence on individuals, irrespective of gender, caste, age and

social status. Moreover, it not only explores the personal trauma but also the social trauma as well. In this way, we may see Temsula Ao as a chronicler of history, taking no sides in dealing with insurgency or armed rebellion, but seeks to present a picture in the backdrop of socio-economic factors. Temsula Ao points out in the Preface to the volume *These Hills called Home* titled “Lest We Forget” that the stories are not about historical facts or condemnation, justice or justification of the events, but a means to convey the emotional and physical trauma of the victims in such conflicts.

For the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life – their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul (Ao, *These Hills* ix-x).

As much as physical violence dominates the narratives of Temsula Ao’s short stories, the trauma and terror goes beyond the physical as well. The recurrent physical violence goes hand in hand with the mental violence inflicted upon the common people too. In a spiral of violence enveloping every walk of the social life, the people were “scarred in mind and soul.” The touch of violence and sadness is also conveyed through the epitaph where she is in the process of questioning, reevaluating and readapting a new set of values in this merging Naga society

I hear the land cry,
 Over and over again
 ‘Let the dead awaken
 And teach the living
 How not to die (Ao, *These Hills* v).

The epitaph is a lamentation of the loss of value and the aftermath which the violent movement leaves behind. It is essentially this ordeal of the common men that Temsula Ao tries to present in her stories through the ordeals of her characters who are enmeshed in the web of violence much against their own wishes, and are forced to choose sides and become unwilling victims in the greater struggle for power taking place in the background. This holds particularly true in the case of the female

characters that have to bear the brunt of violence when their family members or lovers become a part of the underground army, or when the government threatens them in order to 'send a message' to the rebels. Both ways, the women become victims of physical and emotional maiming. The psychological trauma that takes place is not just individual but extends to the entire community. *These Hills called Home* shows the Naga struggle for an independent Nagaland and their continuing search for identity. "The major catalytic forces fuelling insurgency and armed rebellion are more or less same: ethnic assertion, search/quest for separate socio-cultural space and revivalism" (Borah 18). In the case of the Nagas, ethnic assertion and quest for separate socio-cultural space as mentioned by Borah is claimed through armed uprising, as such one may observe how violence becomes an important factor in re-imagining their identity.

From the above observations of the Naga history and Temsula Ao's works, we may observe how violence is triggered by the quest of identity. The search for identity often results in violence, which has been not only in the case of the Nagas, but holds true to different cultures of the world undergoing identity conflicts as well. Violence is often brought into play by any group/force in order to seize power that threatens their identity. Again, this leads us back to the power structure where the dominant force exercises its power over the subordinate. The quest for identity assertion requires one to re-evaluate their status as a subordinate entity. This subordinate role prevents an individual to carry out preferred roles in the power structure and is incapable of attaining the desired status/identity. The Nagas had undoubtedly been imposed this subordinate role by the British colonizers and then by the Indian administration post 1947. Even before the advent of foreign power, the Naga women occupied the subordinate role in the Naga patriarchal system which was present in their culture. However, subordination also comes with benevolence from the part of the dominant power. This element of benevolence is also seen among the Nagas as they transit from the old Naga way of life to the modern times. One may question whether the Nagas accepted their subordinate role because of the benevolence on the part of the dominant power or is it because of physical force/violence enacted upon them. In order to answer this question, an insight into

the subordinate role of the Nagas, of Naga women in the society becomes necessary because it is in the light of these roles that their identities are realized and achieved.

Subordination among the Nagas in this study may be discussed under three points, the subordination of women to the patriarchal system, which have existed from the pre-colonial times till the present, secondly the subordination of the Nagas towards the British colonizers and third, the subordination of the Nagas towards the Indian administration. Looking at the Naga history, prior to the advent of colonialism, the Nagas did not witness subordination as a tribe because in the olden days, each village was independent in its administration. However, within the village the women played the subordinate role to the men. Temsula Ao captures in her essay "Benevolent Subordination: Social Status of Naga Women" on how Naga women have always played a subordinate role in the society. In her essay she recounts a seminar where the chief guest who was a prominent political leader reacted to the status of the Naga women. According to Temsula Ao, this leader raised questions if Naga women had an inferior position? If they were made to cover their heads, walk behind men, eat their meal after men, spent equal amount of money for education, practised dowry system, being a member of the Village Development Boards? However, Temsula Ao claims that this process of questioning the status of women on such a platform with such rage only serves as a perfect example of the fact that Naga male authority still exists over women. The questions raised by this political leader were true to some extent, Naga women enjoy a certain amount of personal freedom and mobility in the society as compared to other women in other societies of India or the world. Their subordinate role also comes accompanied by benevolence as men were considered the overall provider and protector of the village. In this light, one may observe the positive acceptance of this subordinate role of Naga women in the old Naga society solely because of the well defined division of labour.

The division of labour among the men and women in the olden times was crucial in order to maintain the economic stability of the village. As such, in those days, the subordinate status of the women was never questioned. Men were responsible for all physical hard work and heavy labour such as foraging food and

meat, clearing of the jungle, and protection from wild animals and enemies. On the other hand, women take care of all household chores which required less physical strength and hardships. In this way, the stability of the village function was maintained and the subservient role of women was meekly accepted. Temsula Ao comments that the old Naga village system not only guaranteed safety and security but also good governance for all, she writes, “This reality was accepted by all because the system to which they ‘surrendered’ their individuality was one, which worked for the good of all citizens” (Ao, *On Being* 91). However, in the wake of modernity, the division of labour that “worked perfectly in the pre-education and pre-modern rural environment” (Ao, *On Being* 48) can no longer be relevant in the modern set up. Although some concessions were allowed for women with the advent of new religion and education, for instance, girl education, formation of Women’s Worship day, participation in church activities and Village Development Boards etc, their subordinate role to men remains the same. In the essay “On Being a Naga,” Temsula Ao argues how even in the present time, “only men can be decision-makers in important matters both in private and public affairs” (46). She further draws two reasons of women’s subordination to men in the Naga society i.e. physical security and economic exclusivity. Since all landed property belongs to the male, it is only obvious that the male dominates the mental production. This may also be interpreted in the light of the Marxist theory on how material possessions/production directly controls the mental production. As such, in the case of the Ao-Nagas, women remain subordinate to men because they are deprived of all material production. On the other hand, men resume their superior status over women and they continue to hold this economic power till today.

In the light of the above discussion, one may note the difference in the kind of women’s subordination between the olden times and the contemporary times. While in the olden times, women’s subordination may seek certain benevolence from men’s superiority, the benevolent subordination which had once been accepted as a subservient role has now transformed to one which only discriminates the women from enjoying her birthright as a Naga citizen. Temsula Ao writes,

Naga women, no matter how well educated or highly placed in society, suffer from remnants of this psychological ‘trauma’ of subordination, which in their grandmothers’ times might have seemed perfectly logical but which now appears to be a paradox within the ‘modern, educated’ self (Ao, *On Being* 51).

We may draw this psychological trauma mentioned by Temsula Ao under the subject of violence, for here, the psychological trauma falls under mental violence which has been exercised by the patriarchal system over the women since the olden days up to present times. Although Naga women are relatively free today, they still have to face this psychological trauma of trying to fit into a society that continues to consider them as subordinate. Temsula Ao suggests that in order for women to rise from their subordinate role in the society, “it has to start from the grassroots level: the village polity” (51). Even today, the village polity still embarks on the strength of male superiority in which both men and a section of women still support the patriarchal ideology. However, with the transition from urban to rural, agrarian society to modern has shaped the educated women in re-imagining their identity, questioning the old notion of benevolent subordination, and starting from the grassroots level in order to attain their identity as equal to the male counterpart. The benevolence of allowing women to be educated has now in turn enabled the women to utilize that very benevolence to raise voice against the inequality of gender. Temsula Ao writes, “The ‘benevolent subordination’ of old is thus given a new ‘avatar’ which they [men] pass off as their version of ‘empowering’ women” (Ao, *On Being* 52). Today, the word benevolence seems redundant in the modern context and the subordinate status of women is still manifested in the Naga society. The subject on Naga women will further be dealt with in the next chapter of this thesis.

On the topic of violence and subordination, the common man becomes the ultimate victim to the terror and trauma exercised by the external dominant power. Ironically, women are doubly exploited because they have to face the patriarchal subordination as discussed earlier and also the subordinate status as part of the larger Naga tribe towards the outside rulers. Temsula Ao uses ‘Benevolent Subordination’ to refer to the issues regarding the social status of the Naga women and their

subordination to men. Her idea of benevolent subordination also sheds new light on re-interpreting the subordinate role of the Naga people towards the colonial rulers and also their subordination to the Indian administration as well. Hence, the term ‘benevolent subordination’ will be utilized further to re-interpret as to why the Nagas became subordinate to the colonial rulers and how certain benevolence affected their subordinate performances.

It was the American missionaries who came before the British rulers. They were the first to preach Christianity among the people, converting them and introducing the new formal education. The Christian missionaries did not employ force or violence in converting the Naga tribes. Although, the new religion was adopted with doubt and confusion on the part of the tribe, their conversion did not trigger any violence or dismissal of the new belief, in other words, we can say that the new religion was accepted by the Nagas willingly. Very soon, most of the Nagas were converted to Christianity. Since they knew nothing of the new religion, they relied on the missionaries for knowledge and guidance. Sara Mills has explained in her book *Michel Foucault* (2015) on how Foucault described the relation between power and knowledge. She writes,

In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault describes knowledge as being a conjunction of power relations and information-seeking which he terms ‘power/knowledge’ . . . it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to endanger power” (Mills 69).

Hence, one may note that knowledge becomes an integral part of struggles over power. Although the missionaries were just a few in numbers, they attained dominance over the larger Naga community because they were the ones who held knowledge to the new religion. This also shows how power is not always possessed by the larger population of the society. The role of oral tradition and *O tashi* (one who knows many words) as a source of knowledge in the olden days was now shifted to the missionaries. Thus, the knowledge held by the missionaries ultimately earned them superiority over the tribes, and thus they were able to control and direct the Nagas into a subordinate role. This power of knowledge was further enhanced by the

introduction of the new formal education. Education was a big factor in the transition of the Naga society from the old to the new, the changes it brought about has been discussed in the previous chapter starting with the introduction of schools that replaced the traditional institute *Arju*. L. Atola Changkiri specifically mentions in her book on how “the Aos made good use of the school facilities more than any tribe in Nagaland” (36). This is considered to be the reason on why there are more educated people among the Ao-Nagas compared to other Naga tribes.

In the light of Marxist theory, schools became the source of material production in the form of knowledge, thereby controlling the mental production of the people. In this way, education became a tool of oppression, of inserting one’s superiority over the tribe. Mills writes, “It is power/knowledge which produces facts and the individual scholars are simply the vehicles or sites where the knowledge is produced” (70). Moreover, the new education inculcated among the Nagas the belief that their old traditions were primitive and uncivilised, thus they looked up to the missionaries as superior in rank and status. In the poem “Blood of Other Days,” in *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*, Temsula Ao writes,

Stripped of all our basic certainties
 We strayed from our old ways
 . . .
 Schooled our minds to become
 The ideal tabula rasa
 On which the strange intruders
 Began scripting a new history (297).

From the above lines, one may observe that by discarding their old traditions, the Nagas may have unconsciously welcomed the new education system providing the ‘intruders’ or missionaries a clean slate of an “ideal tabula rasa.”

Although the new education debunked the old tradition as primitive nonsense, it also exercised benevolence. The new education helped improve the sanitary conditions of the people, taught healthier food habits, proper hygiene, and new dress

code. Temsula Ao recounts in her essay, “They [the educated tribes] were given special status in terms of scholarships, job reservation and a different yardstick was applied to tribals where academic excellence was concerned” (Ao, *On Being* 42). However, one may question the motive of the rulers because not all acts of benevolence may be traced as beneficial for the Naga people. For instance, education was limited up to a certain standard. The first school was started in the Naga Hills in 1878, Higher education was opened only in 1895, 17 years later. The educated tribes were then employed at the administrative offices for low clerical works or as teachers in school. Most of these employees were Christian converts. Temsula Ao continues, “They were given certain sops in the name of special status, scholarships, reservation in jobs, relaxation of age-bar for admission in schools, colleges, exemptions from tax etc. The tribals now had a completely different identity legally and politically” (Ao, *On Being* 42). Consequently, education and Christianity may be seen side by side as agents to the enabled subordination among the Nagas. Adding to this, the British rulers refrained from educating the tribes to a certain standard, this may be because of the fear that with higher education, the people might subvert their subordinate status, or to prevent the tribes from holding higher positions in the offices which could hinder the power structure of their administration.

The function of the *Dobasis* can also be studied in the light of benevolent subordination. The *Dobasis* were “hand-picked men to act as interpreters” (Ao, *The Ao-Naga* 26). The word *Dobasis* means two language (dou-basha). Temsula mentions how the *Dobasis* were held in great esteem by the public although they were not highly paid. L. Atola Changkiri also mentions how the *Dobashis* were used as a link between the people and the British rulers and how they enjoyed the respect of the people having been accredited with the authority of the government. Although their initial appointment was to interpret, in the course of time they started to assist the British officers in settlement of civil and criminal cases. They started to have a separate court called Dobashi Court which functioned in accordance to the customary law. Changkiri further states that, “The *Dobashis* system was introduced with the objective of local self-governance under the supervision of the British for effective control” (Changkiri 76). Hence, although the Dobashi court served as an important

institution in protecting the Naga identity and Naga Customary laws, the initial motive of the British was for the selfish interest of gaining “effective control” over the people. The decision of the Dobashi court was not absolute. Its decisions may be appealed to the formal magistrate court. This shows that the Dobashi court is inferior/subordinate to the formal law court. The Dobhashi Court is present till today and is equal in status with that of the second class magistrate court. The function of the *Dobashis* remains indispensable till today as the Naga tribe comprise of different sub-tribes and clan who speak different language and dialect.

The withdrawal of the British colonization and set up of a new administration under the Indian government in 1947 witnessed the shift in power from the British rulers to the Indian army. In both cases, the status of the Naga tribe remained subordinate to both external powers. However, by 1947, many educated Nagas had emerged which opened a wider purview of their Naga history and identity. This led to the Naga Nationalist Movement as already discussed earlier. By retrospection, the Nagas had developed a nationalist thinking that aimed at reviving the old Naga tradition and to function as a sovereign independent country. While the subordination to the British rulers was passively accepted by the Nagas, the subordination to the Indian government was met with resistance from the part of the Naga community. This may be explained in the light of Louis Althusser on the Ideological State Apparatus.

According to Marxist theorist Louis Althusser in his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” he stresses on the crucial role of state institutions in the maintenance of dominant ideology. He identifies churches, schools, family, religion, media and other entities as Ideological State Apparatus. Ideological State Apparatus is a term developed by Althusser to denote such institutions which serve to transmit the values of the state. Contrast to the Ideological State Apparatus is the ‘Repressive State Apparatus’ which consist of the armed forces or police, the government, the judiciary and the prison system. Ideological State Apparatus is often used by the dominant power to reproduce and transmit the mental production of the state. In the case of the Nagas, the technique employed by the American missionaries and British rulers paralleled Louis Althusser’s concept of Ideological State

Apparatus i.e. to transmit their ideas and values thereby luring the tribes into adopting the dominant ideology especially by means of schools and religion. Schools and churches are particularly efficient because it is where the common people draw knowledge of all the foreign ideas and values. Under this method, Mills says that “individuals are simply dupes of ideological pressures” (34).

Temsula Ao has written on how these institutions were tactfully used by the foreign rulers to transmit their religious and western ideologies to the tribes. She writes, “If the British rulers and white missionaries treated the tribals with a condescending curiosity and to a certain extent, Christian benevolence, the new rulers invented new ways to fit tribals into a new constitution by giving an entirely new definition to their tribal identity” (Ao, *On Being* 42). By employing the Ideological State Apparatus, the American missionaries and British rulers designated a subordinate role which was passively received by the Nagas. In this way, what seemed as a benevolent gesture for the Nagas from the part of the foreign rulers and missionaries can also be seen as a factor which determined their subordinate role, and as a result which also controlled their subordinate performances. Temsula Ao admits this as she writes in her poem “Blood of Other Days,”

We borrowed their minds,
 Aped their manners,
 Adopted their gods
 And become perfect mimics (Ao, *Book of Songs* 297).

Contrary to the foreign rulers and missionaries, the Indian Government employed the Repressive State Apparatus and took to armed forces to rule over the Nagas. The Indian Army employed military intervention, repressing the Nagas through violent means. Hence, this marked one of the many reasons as to why the Nagas reacted to their subordination towards the Indian government with great resistance and hostility. The educated elite among the Nagas also contributed in the cultural awakening because they had utilized their education to analyze and retrospect their cultural and political history. In doing so, they realised that much of their Naga identity had been oppressed and subordinated, this created a resistance

towards foreign elements that denounced their old Naga identity. Due to the devaluation of the Naga identity and culture, like all other regions under colonialism, Nagaland also faced cultural alienation. This cultural alienation forced the Nagas in the 'in-between' region of their own culture and that of the foreign culture, as a result their identity both as a tribe and individual ultimately face the same alienation.

Today, writers like Temsula Ao seek literature as a means to counter the cultural alienation suffered by their people over the years. Fractured by violence and being oppressed by foreign rulers, the people have now come to an awakening to trace their history and origin. This retrospection is crucial in the re-imagining of their identities because who they are today is determined by who they were in the past and the factors that affected them in the process of transition from the old to the new. Although the Nagas have suffered from traumatic violence and foreign subordination imposed by the 'other,' both in the case of the British and India, yet its culture is not altogether lost. The ongoing process of redefining on what constitutes the Naga identity may be studied through the lens of Stuart Hall.

Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" states that cultural identity is "not an essence but a positioning" (226). This simply means that cultural identity is not a fixed essence which is rooted in the past. In his essay, Hall defines two types of cultural identity, the first is a "shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' . . . which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (223). Hall gives his second definition as,

Cultural Identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power (225).

He further states that it is through this comprehension on cultural identity that one can properly understand the traumatic character of the colonial experience.

Stuart Hall's definition on cultural identity holds an important observation which can be applied to the study of the cultural identity of the Nagas. The concept of "being" and 'becoming' holds true for the Naga identity because they are still in the process of change, from 'being' the stone people from Lungterok to 'becoming' the modern Naga today. Hence, the Naga identity is neither fixed in their past nor has come to a fixed position, rather it undergoes 'constant transformation' as Hall puts it. This constant transformation is shaped by their past especially by their colonial experience and the bitter violence that enveloped the land since the 1950s. The underlying conscious attitude of being colonised and the trauma experienced through the political upheavals still exist among the Nagas placing them in the periphery of the power structure. In order to revive the essence of the Naga identity, one may suggest the method of Hall's 'positioning.' The study of the works of Temsula Ao then becomes an important insight into the culture and tradition of the Nagas, and ultimately an insight to what makes the Naga identity. These insights carried on by Temsula Ao generate a conscious attitude among the Nagas in positioning their cultural identity within the narratives of their past. As quoted by Edward Said in *Culture Imperialism*, Jules Harman writes,

It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native people is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity" (qtd. in Said 18).

In the views of Jules Harman, in order to re-imagine the state of one's identity, one needs to accept the dichotomy of superior/subordinate which is present in every culture and civilization. It is true that the Nagas were oppressed by the "mechanical, economic and military . . . [and] moral superiority" of the British and Indian Army, but in order to rise above such colonial experience and subordination, it would require a collective cultural awakening of the Naga society. The spirit of

patriotism and social issues focussed in the works of Temsula Ao contributes to a large extent in the ongoing national consciousness for re-imagining the Naga identity. The process of rediscovery of the Naga self would require a different perspective, not from the inferior mindset inculcated by the oppressors, but from the all-inclusive perspective which is comprehensively cross-disciplinary in its approach.

Stuart Hall in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* quoted Frantz Fanon who writes, “Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.” Therefore, the Naga society too, in the light of postcolonial studies needs to rediscover the production of their identity “grounded in the re-telling of the past” (224). The process of transition, resistance, power and the prevalence of violence and subordination all heralded an impulse to create or re-create a new perspective of what the Naga identity is today. As quoted in Yanthan et al., Article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples reads,

Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (52).

Although the Nagas belong to an indigenous group who have every other right to self-determine their identity, status and culture, it is because of the factors discussed in the early chapters viz. Colonialism, western education, Christianity, violence, subordination etc which pre-determine the status of their cultural identity at the present time. Hall has written that cultural identity “has its histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother, is always-already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall 226).

The last line is worth noting because in order to re-imagine one's identity, one needs to position its origin to a well grounded standpoint. Temsula Ao positions the identity of the Ao-Nagas to the stone-people of Lungterok as its original

standpoint. The process of their transformation to the modern times is constructed through what Hall had mentioned, “through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (226). Hence, history plays an important role in the study. Moreover, the role of the historians should also be taken into account because the account of outside and inside writers varies in different ways. As recounted by Temsula Ao in her writings, the re-imagining of the Naga identity and parallel to it, the re-imagining of the Ao-Naga identity has already gained the interest of the new generation “spearheading a movement for retrospection as well as introspection in the face of all that has gone wrong in the Naga society” (Ao, *On Being* ix). She further suggests that the review and re-defining of their identity should be carried off “with mature sensitivity and extreme caution in such a global juxtaposition” (ix). She also suggests that the Oral Tradition should be the guiding force “to remind, re-energize and re-enforce the people’s sense of themselves through succeeding generation” (3).

Referring back to the title of this chapter, the brutal violence that prevailed in the Naga society and of the presence of benevolent subordination has affected the people both at the social and personal level. The study on the topic of violence shows how identities (both cultural and personal) are distorted, disfigured and destroyed. It also shows how violence is inflicted upon the subordinates resulting in a further maiming through threat and trauma. Although subordination receives benevolence at certain levels which was seen as beneficent to the subordinate to some extent, the study also shows that it often works to foster further inferiority of the subordinates, which in turn also determine their subordinate performances. It may be noted here once again that the study of violence and benevolent subordination among the collective Naga people parallels what the Ao-Nagas underwent as an independent tribe. The overlapping and shared history the different Naga tribes is acknowledged in the study.

In studying the impact of violence and subordination on the Naga identity, there are also other factors which contribute in the determination of what makes the Naga identity today. Within the Naga society, women play an important role yet their subordination remains hegemonized by the dominant patriarchal system and ideology. Hence, the next chapter titled “Ao-Naga women under patriarchy and

dominant ideology” will further delve into the study on the Ao-Naga women who experience variations of subordination and violence under patriarchy and the dominant ideology that refrain them from enjoying their birthright identity: that of Naga citizenship.

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CHAPTER 4

AO-NAGA WOMEN UNDER PATRIARCHY AND DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

The Ao-Naga society like all other Naga tribes of Nagaland is patriarchal in its nature even before the pre-colonial time. Women in the Ao-Naga society played an important role and their responsibilities within the society remained indispensable. However, a women's upbringing was conditioned by the tradition to behave in a certain way and function as a subordinate gender. Till today, women in the Ao-Naga society have their social functions under the consent of the male decision makers. A prominent aspect within the Ao-Naga society since the olden days was the exclusion of women in any of the decision making in the village on important matters both public and private. Temsula Ao has thrown light on the status of women in her society through her essays, fiction and non-fiction, short stories and poems. When she writes about the Ao-Naga woman as part of the tribe, she also stresses on the need to create space for the identity of women in the Ao-Naga society. Therefore, a study on the Ao-Naga women in the works of Temsula Ao is a necessary and important aspect that contributes to re-imagining the collective Ao-Naga identity.

Under patriarchy and dominant ideology, the Ao-Naga women have to cope with the various realities of daily life where in many cases they fall victim to conflicts not of their creation own making. In the case of the Naga insurgency which began in the 1950s, women suffered as civilians for they are the wives and daughters of the underground, the injured, the disabled and the death, yet all the while having to fulfil their responsibilities as a mother and wife, sister and daughter. In studying the subordination on the part of the tribal community, the subordination becomes twofold for a woman who is considered weaker and having a lower status than the male. Hence, this chapter will study the Ao-Naga women under patriarchy and dominant ideology that favours male chauvinism based on the works of Temsula Ao. The study on Ao-Naga women is essential in order to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity because it is the status of both genders that determines the formation of the Ao-Naga identity as a whole. It may be noted here that, the word Ao-Naga and Naga

may be used interchangeably as required by the study with regard to circumstances and context which encompass the collective Naga women.

When one talks of ‘dominant ideology,’ the term can be defined in various ways. According to Marxist philosophy, the term dominant ideology denotes the attitudes, ideas, beliefs, values and morals shared by the majority of the people in a given society. This dominant ideology acts as a mechanism of social control, it frames how the majority of the population think about the nature of society, their place in society, and their connection to a social class (Bullock et al. 236). According to Terry Eagleton in *Ideology: An Introduction* (2007), the word ideology is “a process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life” or “a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class; ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power” (1). Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1997) defined it as “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group” (55). In the light of the above definitions, the study will further trace how dominant ideologies have been formed in the Ao-Naga society and how it has influenced the attitude and mentality of the Ao-Naga people and how this has in turn impacted women in their society.

Women have often been silent sufferers yet upholders of the tradition and traditional values of the family and society, oppressed by patriarchal authority wherein the culture exercises a dominant ideology which dictates specific roles to be played out by the women. Prominent Naga women writers like Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Kire and Nini Lungalang have shared their views on the status and condition of the Naga women through their literary discourse. Their works provide a vast insight on the subject of women’s identity and status of women in the Naga society. As a woman and a mother, Temsula Ao has written about women and their relation to the society and she reveals a keen interest on women issues which is reflected in her poems, short stories and other works as well. Through her works, she portrays the role of women in the society and family, at the same time, she also highlights the dominant ideologies which disfavours women in various

aspects of the social set-up. The sufferings of women and her own womanhood have a dominant presence in her poems. In the poem “Woman” she writes,

For twelve long miserable years
 My life coursed away
 At the core of my womanhood
 Draining all joy and hope,
 Tainting existence
 With the leprous out-pouring
 Of unhealing emanation (Ao, *Book of Songs*, 33).

From the above, one notes the sacrifices that womanhood entails. Although womanhood is a prestigious status, it can also be seen as a state of suffering and hardship. The poem is not just a portrayal of suffering, but a fight for self liberation and urging other women to stand up against to victimhood and not remain mute. The study of women in the Naga society will be taken up in this study within the timeframe within the pre-colonial times till the present.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the Ao-Naga society is primarily a patriarchal one. Yet, in comparison to other societies of other regions in India, women in the Ao-Naga society enjoy a fair amount of freedom. Having said that, although the Ao-Naga society is free of repressive practices such as female infanticide, wearing burqas or the practice of heavy dowry system which has been a dominant issue in India, it still has its share of oppression and exploitation. As Isabel Yrogoyei puts it, all women “are not equally oppressed” (Hooks 59). The degree of oppression and exploitation of women in all societies differ from one another based on the context of class, caste, economic groundings, and so on. The first and foremost grounding which deprived the Ao women of their equality with men was the Ao customary laws and practices which had been practiced since the olden times, was based on male privileging. Temsula Ao writes in her poem “Woman”,

Time perpetuated her assignment
 And custom prevailed

Even when she cried and wailed
In protest (Ao, *Book of Songs* 17).

One noticeable factor in the customary laws was that the Ao women were not allowed to take part in any of the village administration. In the Ao-Naga society, each village had its independent administration of its own, and the governing body consisted of male villagers representing the founder clans of the village. According to L.Sosang Jamir in *Ao Naga Customary Laws and Practices* (2012), he mentions that women were deprived of the rights and position in the administration because they were considered physically weaker than men. From a neutral point of view, the absence of women in the administration is somewhat valid because there were specific roles played within the society by both genders, while the women were confined to household chores and other domestic activities, the men were engaged with hunting, guarding their village and other heavier works. This division of labour somehow maintained the balance of work role in the society, and this maintenance of balance was considered crucial for the sustainability of the village.

Although being born a male child is considered a privilege in the Naga society, women too have been treated with a certain degree of respect. However, the domestic responsibility does not entitle her to have a life outside her household, and if ever the woman fails to fulfil or shows lack of responsibility in managing her household, society would backbite and label her as an irresponsible wife or mother. Since honour is an important status aimed by every tribe and family, the women would not dare to bring dishonour to the family prestige, hence she is eventually compelled to accept her subordinate role to male domination. This fact may be seen in the case of Aosenla, a character in Temsula Ao's novel *Aosenla's Story* (2017) where she was forced into marriage against her will. Aosenla eventually yielded to her father's decision and "when she saw the happiness on her parent's faces, she did not have the heart to protest any more" (26). This has often been the case for Naga women where they have to comply with the patriarchal male authority even if that requires individual sacrifice on their part. This also shows how Naga women put

family honour before their individual happiness or aspirations. Temsula Ao also writes on the topic of women's submission in her poem, "Woman,"

Man beguiled her
 Into submission
 Thus establishing
 Timeless dominion
 While he forayed and strayed (Ao, *Book of Songs* 17).

The above lines show how the Naga women have been dominated by the patriarchal system since the olden days and how this has continued till today, as seen in the story of Aosenla i.e. post-colonial times where the Nagas have already witnessed modernity. In the wake of modernity, the Naga society has transitioned from old traditions to a new and globalized world. However, one thing which has not changed is the subordination of women under patriarchy. One may note that the patriarchal system dominates the Ao-Naga society because the system is further validated and strengthened by the Ao customary laws and practices.

In the essay "Articulate and Inarticulate Exclusion" from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014), Temsula Ao brings to light how the Ao customary law disqualifies the Ao women in the village administration. She writes about women being excluded from the *Putu Menden* (village government). A woman cannot perform religious rites and sacrifices unless assisted by her husband or other male authority. She is not entitled to get honour or titles like the men folk. When it comes to inheritance and landed property, the Ao woman cannot inherit any land (95). Even if she possessed landed property from her father or her husband, she cannot give them to her daughters, and the possession would be handed over to her son when he comes of age or to the nearest male heir of her clan after the woman's death. The disqualification of women solely based on gender reveals how the Ao customary laws encouraged and reinforced of patriarchal power over women.

Furthermore, according to the customary law, if a married woman commits adultery, she has to leave the house immediately and she is automatically bereft of

the custody of the children. On the contrary, if the man commits adultery, he has to give away half of his property which was obtained after his marriage to his wife in the case of divorce. Should she continue to be married, the woman is however expected by the society to forgive him. Whatever be the case for divorce, the man always gets the custody of the children in the Naga society. If the woman is barren and cannot bear a child, it often leads to divorce as well. Thus, a Naga woman is bound by many traditions and customary norms.

However, having said that, tradition and customs also protect the rights of women in some cases. In *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), Temsula Ao points out how “social customs never denied the personal dignity and rights as daughter, sister, wife and mother” (161). In the book, Temsula Ao cited an example where a woman cannot be ill-treated or persecuted by her husband or his relatives because her family can always come to her aid in such circumstances. This indicates that the woman is duly protected by her family even though she has been given away in marriage. The role of the maternal uncle is also crucial regarding family relations because his presence is indispensable in certain rites and ceremonies in the family. Temsula Ao continues, “A widow too, until she remarries, is cared for, by the late husband’s family” (161). If this be the case, then it would be wrong to consider the Ao-Naga customs and practices as entirely gender biased.

In *Aosenla’s Story*, we find how the dignity of the protagonist Aosenla is protected by her family and clan members. In the novel, Aosenla was accused of having an affair with a co-worker Toshi because she used to come home late. The mother-in-law was furious, she shamed Aosenla for her behaviour saying, “a mother’s place is in the house and instead of being there to attend to their needs, you go gallivanting around town and come home so late” (38). Here, Aosenla was further shamed by her husband Bendang who slapped her in the presence of his sisters, his mother and maternal uncle, who had gathered and waited for her in their home to confront her. She was helpless and vulnerable regarding the false accusation. However, though Aosenla was terribly shaken, she managed to challenge the accusation of her husband’s family by replying:

This is a grave accusation and I am not prepared to let this unfounded attack on my integrity go unchallenged. After all I too have a family and clan members . . . I shall send word to my father, uncles and other clan members and only in their presence can we have a proper hearing to determine if there is any truth in your accusation; it is not going to be settled like this with all of you ganging up on me (39).

The courageous words of Aosenla silenced the gathering as she walked out the room. Her reply subverted her helpless situation where her husband's family cannot discredit her anymore. This situation in the novel offers an example on how tradition and customs protect the rights of women in some cases and shows "the advantage of belonging to a powerful clan in the village" (40). By standing up against her husband's family, Aosenla had taken an important step towards asserting herself and demanding due respect as an equal among them.

Another aspect to be noted among the Ao woman during the olden days was the tattooing of the body. Although the tattooing of the body was a painstaking task, it was crucial for a girl for marriage. Since women cannot take part in rites or attain honour or titles, tattooing became a means to earn admiration and honour in their society. According to L.Sosang Jamir, "Tattooing was a rite of passage and perfection for an Ao woman" (78). Along with the painstaking tattooing, the Ao woman was expected to abstain from eating various plants and meat such as dog meat, mutton chicken, pig's intestine, frog, catfish, dragonfly nymph, crab, snake headed fish, tadpole, fish, freshwater eel, cliff antelope, monkey, porcupine, beaver, pangolin, dove, Quail, babbler, Green Magpie, Imperial pigeon and cane-berries or kamri-berries (L. Jamir 149-153). However, tattooing gradually stopped when the Aos converted to Christianity. If it was not for Christianity, the Ao women would still have to undertake the painstaking tradition in order to earn admiration and honour.

Arju (boys dormitory) in the olden day may be seen as a privileged institution for boys in the patriarchal Naga society, however the *Arju* serves as a crucial institution to train and educate young lads, this in turn benefits in safeguarding the

whole village, and the security was enjoyed by all. The exclusion of girls from the *Arju* can be seen as a gesture to exempt the women folk from what was considered a man's work and in this way, it could also be seen as an act of kindness shown towards the women who were considered physically weaker than men. This shows the mentality of the whole society which considered men as different from women not only physically, but also mentally, emotionally and intellectually as well. The source of difference is yet again based on the social construct of patriarchy which was already instilled since the olden days. Temsula Ao mentions the expression which is often used in the Ao community, *anu nuza* meaning women and children. She further points out how the expression has often been used "to denote the trivial and the petty and used as a dismissive term" (*On Being* 96). This usage of the word *anu nuza* expresses the extent of a woman's inferior status in the olden times and how women and children were regarded as unworthy of consideration.

According to the Ao Customary Law, before the Ao man marries, he has to build a new house where he shall take his wife to begin a new family. Hence, Ao courting consists of promises and offers for the new wife by the man. In the poem "Man to Woman," Temsula Ao highlights how men tried their best to convince their women, praising them for their beauty, skills, dancing and zest for hard work. Contrary to all the admiration in wooing a woman, in "Woman to Man," Temsula Ao points out how these promises were never met later on or at most, only half fulfilled. This shows the treacherous nature of men under patriarchal dominance because once the woman enters the house, she is subjected to accomplish all household chores and work from morning to dusk. In the poem, Temsula Ao observes that even the man's *dao* is blunt, which proves that he hardly works for a living.

In another poem, "Woman," Temsula Ao writes about the sacrificial role of a woman, how she takes care of everyone else around her, but the irony lies in the fact that she is never given the respect or credit for her conduct, instead she remains neglected, oppressed by the male authority and burdened by the social customs.

Nature fashioned her thus.

To bear the burden

To hold the seed
 And feed
 Every other need
 But hers (Ao, *Book of Songs*, 17).

Since the olden days, household chores remained identified with women. Even in the contemporary times, all housework is conducted by the women. Regarding this issue, Harajit Goswami writes, “This is because the division of labour in the households is done in a gendered manner. Certain types of tasks get identified with the female and certain with the male. Housework and childrearing is considered as a natural and culturally expected responsibility of being a wife” (92). This validates that culture exercises a dominant ideology which dictates specific roles to be played out by the women. Myra Marx Ferree observes that women, “often accept it as an expected element of being a wife, or the price of domestic harmony . . . and as an expression of both love and subordination” (877). When a woman accepts the significance of motherhood, she inflicts upon herself the dilemma of fulfilling societal roles and her personal aspirations. This aspect of dilemma is prominent in the works of Temsula Ao as she hangs between accepting/ rejecting or trying to merge the two. This conflict between conforming to the dominant patriarchal tradition and the equally compelling need to break the conventional barrier often leads to alienation, loneliness and isolation. Moreover, since everything is at the consent of the father in the Ao-Naga society and not the girl, often too, the girl child is arranged for marriage at a very early age, thereby leaving no room for further education or her personal aspirations.

Exploitation of women by men remains a recurrent theme in Temsula Ao’s poem. In her poem “Woman,” Temsula Ao writes:

But woman,
 Thus fashioned
 Thus oppressed
 Beguiled and betrayed,
 Sometimes rebelled

To break the mould
 And shake off the hold
 That nature devised
 And man improvised (Ao, *Book of Songs*, 17).

The exploitation varies from emotional to physical abuse, ranging from themes of loneliness, sadness, fear and pain. In her poem, “Pain,” we see the pain of a woman drowned in a well of physical abuse. The poem clearly shows the disinterest of the woman to the man whom she refers to as the “familiar fiend.”

He sat squat
 On my breast
 Baring his teeth
 In sardonic mirth,
 And gloating grotesque
 Over the misery
 Of my life.
 ...
 I hated him (Ao, *Book of Songs*, 77).

The very men who are expected to love and protect women as promised in the poem “Man to Woman,” are the ones who exercise abuse over women. In other cases, it is not just the dominance of men that creates sufferings for the woman, Temsula Ao is also aware that being a woman has its own disadvantage in itself. Kekhrieseno Christina also observes, “Every Naga woman has undergone humiliations and insults from men on the basis of her womanhood. These men are not considered outsiders or strangers; they are ‘respected’ uncles, cousins and in some cases fathers and brothers who never fail to remind women about the ‘predestined inferior roles’ that have been slated out to them” (Christina 69).

In her poem, “Scrutiny” she reflects on the process of childbirth and concludes that the pain of childbirth is the “price you pay for being born a woman.” According to her, childbirth and motherhood adds to the burden of being a woman

and it systematically forces women to accept their subordinate status in the society. Although some people are of the opinion that childbirth completes a woman, the very same can also be seen as a hindrance for the meaningful growth of the woman in fulfilling her personal desires and aspirations. In *Feminism and the Individual* (2005), R. J. Kalpana makes the following observations:

Women are doubly yoked to the reproduction process, by the psychological assertion that motherhood is an eminently desirable status, and by laying the burden of continuing the human race on the shoulders of women. Feminist ethos states reproduction to be the source of women's oppression. Reproduction entails marriage (7).

The observation made by R. J. Kalpana aligns with Temsula Ao in viewing reproduction or childbirth as a source of women's oppression. The biological difference of womanhood is seen as an inferior status by the society at large, yet without which would mark the break off point of any civilization. Hence, society needs to embrace motherhood and not see reproduction or childbirth as only a physical responsibility of women. Myra Marx Ferree further observes, "Feminists agree that male dominance within families is part of a wider system of male power, is neither natural nor inevitable, and occurs at women's cost" (866).

Although women have to endure the burden of womanhood at some point in their lives, like the characters in her stories, Temsula Ao empowers herself within her own situation, making the best of what she can in the patriarchal circumstances, to "breathe and fight in a man's world" (*Book of Songs*, 128) and thus she is able to create a new woman in herself. She writes,

And I with native wiles
Lured the man
Into my world (*Book of Songs*, 128).

With these lines, she claims that "the catcher became the caught" (128) which reveal the true woman in her. These lines can also be read as a word of

encouragement for all the women who are also struggling in the domestic web of patriarchal authority to stand up for one self.

Besides her poems, her memoir *Once Upon A Life* (2013) speaks volumes of her rough childhood, early marriage and a married life with four children. Her recollected experience and self-retrospection highlights the various issues undergone by women in various walks of life. In this memoir, one may witness the prominence of the oppressive system of the Naga society, wherein a girl child has less privilege than her male siblings, the taboo of early marriage and other superstitious religious beliefs which exploit the female gender all together. The societal attitude towards the girl child remains inferior and she is tangled between the patriarchal dominance and societal expectations. On the subject of marriage, matrimony is of course an important bond, a culturally recognised union between two people which is a crucial institution for the existence of the human race. However, in some of the cases, for instance in *Once Upon A Life* and *Aosenla's Story*, marriage becomes an institution which result in marginalization, subordination or oppression of women. Many contemporary women writers have critiqued the institution of marriage as exploitative and which leads to the oppression of women. R.J. Kalpana points out that,

Marriage in our society is more important for a woman's happiness than a man's. The woman's view of marriage influences her general feelings of well-being. Since women have been forced to put all their eggs in one basket of marriage, they have more at stake in its stability and they pay a high price for their dependency (44-45).

Some women writers are more vociferous in their expression, for instance Shashi Deshpande writes in her novel *The Binding Vine* (1992), "Tell me, is getting married so important to a woman? . . . It takes much greater courage to dispense with a man's protection." (87-88) In her memoir *Once Upon A Life*, Temsula Ao confesses that "growing up within the conventional mores of marriage was not easy" (176) and that she feels "displaced and disoriented" (164) in her marriage. However, she writes,

I learned to develop this dual personality: the meek docile wife and housewife and the curious, eager person thirsting for more knowledge through discussions with like-minded people (*Once Upon*, 177).

When Temsula Ao uses the word ‘more’ in the above lines, one may approach it through the explanations given by Betty Friedan who also uses the word ‘more’ in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) to define careers. “I want something more than my husband and my children and my house” (qtd. in Hooks 1). Friedan simply points out the plight of women confined within the household who wants something ‘more’ in life, to be free of their house labour and given equal access to men’s profession. In other words, ‘more’ here also means professional careers. Friedan confirms this empty feeling which reflects the same emptiness undergone by Temsula Ao and also the women characters of her story particularly, Aosenla. Friedan raises a point that, “It is urgent to understand how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of emptiness, non-existence, nothingness in women” (qtd. in Hooks 2).

The status of the woman in her family is directly linked with the status of women in the society. Family is an important kinship structure wherein values in social life are first taught. In her book *Women’s Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter* (1988), Michele Barrett has pointed out two main functions of the family provided by Talcott Parsons, “to socialize children into society’s normative system of values and to inculcate ‘appropriate’ status expectations, and to provide a stable emotional environment that will cushion the (male) worker from the psychological damage of the alienating occupational world” (Barrett 188-189). According to Parsons, these functions are carried out by the wife and mother. Thus, the woman becomes the nurturer and supporter while the man becomes the provider and decision maker. The functions of family put forth by Parsons greatly resemble the Ao-Naga family where the man is the breadwinner with his dependent wife and children. The specific gender roles carried out in the family plays an important role in conforming to the familial ideology as girls are taught to be like their mother, and boys are taught to be more independent and be like their

father. In this way, the family becomes the prime agent for gender discrimination and hence can be held responsible for the prime agent of women oppression as well. Like Parsons, John Hodge holds the same notion towards family institutions. In his essay “Dualist Culture and Beyond,” Hodge writes:

It is in this form of the family where most children first learn the meaning and practice of hierarchical, authoritarian rule. Here is where they learn to accept group oppression against themselves as non-adults, and where they learn to accept male supremacy and the group oppression of women. Here is where they learn that it is male’s role to work in the community and control the economic life of the family and to mete out the physical and financial punishments and rewards, and the female’s role to provide the emotional warmth associated with motherhood while under the economic rule of the male. Here is where the relationship of superordination-subordination, of superior-inferior, of master-slave is first learned and accepted as ‘natural’ (qtd. in Hooks 37).

Over the years, gender roles and relationship between men and women have been accepted as ‘natural’ because one is socialized right from birth to accept this familial construct. Moreover, many agree to the fact that the role of women and men within a family supplements one another, especially in terms of material relations because it brings stability within the family institution.

In the novel *Aoesenla’s Story* by Temsula Ao, Aosenla is restricted from continuing her job after their marriage, and thus she is confined within the house against her will, for the sake of conforming to the family decision. Temsula Ao writes, “She was no longer her own self; she was the wife of a rich man and the daughter-in-law of an influential family. She no longer had an independent identity” (*Aoesenla* 2). Christine Delphy points out that, “even though marriage with a man from the capitalist class can raise a woman’s standard of living, it does not make her a member of that class. She herself does not own the means of production” (qtd. in Barrett 14). Similar to Delphy’s point, the marriage of Aosenla into a wealthy and influential family does not grant her equal status with that of her husband, on the

contrary, Aosenla is trapped between the domination of her husband and trying to find her own independent identity.

Since male dominance rule the family, mothers are often caught between loyalty to her husband and sympathy for her daughters even when decisions are made against the daughter. This has also been the case for Aosenla's mother in *Aosenla's Story*. She remains unable to express her concerns openly regarding her daughter's wellbeing. One may observe here that women are often subjected to take up responsibilities just because it is their husband's wish. While some women protest this notion, others blindly accept their inferiority. For instance, Aosenla's grandmother advises her that a woman needs the protection of a man all her life no matter how educated or rich or well-placed the woman is. She further says, "A man may be blind or lame or ugly, but he is superior because he is a man and we are women and helpless" (*Aosenla* 18). Temsula Ao is aware of the gender bias of the patriarchal society which excludes women from traditional institutions, modern economic and political structures has limited women to having little or no choices at all in life. Although women like Aosenla's grandmother meekly accepts the male authority, Aosenla shows her disapproval. Unfortunately, this act of disapproval on Aosenla's part does not win the decision of her father. In the end, even though Aosenla does not want to go by her father's decision, she has no choice but to give in. "She felt like an actor on a stage who was being coerced to perform on cues from invisible prompters" (19). This highlights the vulnerability, oppression, the absence of choice and exclusion of women in decision making within the family.

On the notion of choices, Bell Hooks argues that, "Being oppressed means the absence of choices" (Hooks 5). The absence of choices and decision making among the women in the Ao-Naga society clearly reveal the fact that the status of women is is one of male dominant. The reason why women have been denied of decision making role may be traced back to the fact that they have been conditioned in the system of patriarchy for so long and men on the other hand have been accustomed to the passive role of women in the family. Bell Hooks mentions Elizabeth Janeway who argues in her book *Powers of the Weak* (1981) that women

need to know how to exercise their personal power as an act of resistance and strength. She calls this power, ‘power of disbelief.’ She says that, “failing to exercise the power of disbelief made it difficult for women to reject prevailing notions of power and envision new perspectives” (qtd. in Hooks 93).

Men clearly enjoy the privileges of their patriarchal authority over women. And when they think that their authority has been challenged by women, they search for measures to assert their authority even if that requires violence. This has been the case in *Aosenla*, when Aosenla picks up the habit of reading books, her husband comments, “Books give people the wrong ideas” (Ao, *Aosenla* 34) and accuses her for wasting money on unnecessary things. Temsula Ao in her essay “Benevolent Subordination” from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014) mentions how a female child is sent to school up to the stage where she can read the Bible, and then it is considered sufficient for her. She adds, “Merit was never the decider, being male was” (Ao, *On Being*, 47). Most girls attend schools to the primary and middle level, however, beyond that girls are often expected to help out their parents at home so that their brothers can continue with their higher education. This expectation from the girl child is seen as a duty by the society rather than a sacrifice made by the girl for her family.

Stephen Morton comments on this matter through the argument raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” He writes “the everyday lives of many ‘Third World’ women are so complex and unsystematic that they cannot be known or represented in any straightforward way by the vocabularies of western critical theory” (Morton 7). Morton continues that the crisis in the knowledge and understanding in such area categorised women as the oppressed group easily victimised by the privileged intellectuals. In this way, the struggles of the women become voiceless and silenced.

In some of her works, Temsula Ao also points out how discrimination of the gender starts at childbirth. In the novel *Aosenla's Story*, the protagonist Aosenla experiences indifference not only from her husband, but also from her husband's family because she did not bear them a male child. This shows that the preference of

a male child still exists even in contemporary times and that women are still blamed with regard to a child's gender. Similarly, in the short story "Three Women" in *Laburnam for my Head* (2009), gender discrimination against a female child is seen. In the story, Temsula Ao depicts three generations of women Memdela, Martha, Merensashi, each of whom undergo suppression and domination. Their harsh reality is the unique factor which binds them in a strange trio. Martha's mother died due to delivery complications, and the husband foolishly blames the newborn Martha for it, and refuses to accept her.

What would I do with another girl? Do whatever you want;
I don't want to see her ever, she who has just killed my wife
(Ao, *Laburnum* 68).

Here, the cruelty of Martha's father in cursing and disowning the daughter shows the oppressive male dominance even towards an innocent new born. Had Martha been a boy, things would have been different. This shows that the male child still remains a preference over the female child among the Nagas. When Memdela adopted Martha, she reflects on her appearance, "Dark as a bat, with distinctly aboriginal features and a head of thick curly hair" (*Laburnam* 69) when she herself was an Ao-Naga, of medium height, fair complexion and still young. One may observe that the discrimination on women within the society still exist based on their features, skin colour and hair.

As much as oppression and violation of women is prominent in Temsula Ao's short stories, she also dwells on the strength of the Naga women. One may note that not all her women characters are weak and oppressed. In some of her short stories, Temsula Ao portrays women characters who take up responsibilities into their hands and end up solving problems and saving situations. For instance, Imdongla from "A Simple Question" in *Laburnam for my Head* is a unique character among Temsual Ao's women characters. Imdongla was "barely literate" but was well conversant with the history and political discussions of the village, she was "otherwise a worldly-wise woman" (81). Her intelligence and bravery saved her husband from the army officer by asking a simple question, "What do you want from us?" (87) She became a peace

maker between the military and the underground. Her act proves that even a simple village woman can take up the role of negotiation when both the male parties fail to negotiate.

In “The Jungle Major” in *These Hills Called Home* (2006), Khatia saved her husband Punaba with her wit and intelligence. Punaba was an underground who visited his wife, Khatia after a gap of five months. However, a surprised checking befell them. The clever wife then smeared the face, hands and legs of her husband with ash from the hearth and started to abuse him like a servant. She then shoved Punaba disguised as the servant to fetch water. In this way, Khatia helped Punaba in escaping the inspection of the Captain and his army. Thus, because of her timely actions, Punaba was able to live a normal life as a mechanic under the State Transport Department. Likewise, in other Ao folklores, there have been Ao women who were portrayed as capable, bold, wise and witty, who had been known to be good counsellors to men. For instance, in one of the Ao myth, Ongangla in Chungliyimti village was a soothsayer with divine powers who played an efficient role of an advisor, guide and counsellor to the villagers. Her intelligent advice for the village to overcome a terrible famine marks the origin of the *Moatsu* festival, which is one of the major festivals of the Ao-Naga tribe. Moreover, old women/grandmothers often served as the store house and reservoir of the rich Ao-Naga oral tradition.

In writing about the Ao-Naga women, Tamsula Ao often incorporates the use of metaphors drawn from nature such as forest, trees, rivers, mountains and animals. The presence of nature provides significant backdrop in comparing the status of the women. This comparison of the status of women with nature may be studied under the branch of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. The term was coined by a French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)* published in 1974. According to Mary Mellor, “Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women” (1). Tamsula Ao explores the

ecological world of her region through her writings, especially through her poetry where she portrays nature as an important form of ethnic identity of her people.

For most communities of the Northeast of India including the Ao-Naga tribe, the people have a close relation with their immediate ecological surroundings. Nature forms an integral part of their life and this aspect is prominent in the writings emanating from the region. Likewise, Temsula Ao holds deep concerns about the destruction of the mountains and of nature. The constant reference to mountains in her poems can be read as a reference to the root of her tribe, or womanhood. The exploitation of nature that surrounds the mountain reflects the exploitation of women in the region. In her poem, “Lament for Earth” she writes:

Alas for the forest
Which now lies silent
Stunned and stumped
With the evidence of rape.
As on her breasts
The elephant trample
The lorries rumble
Loaded with her treasures
Bound for the mills
At the foothills (Ao, *Book of Songs* 42-43).

Here, the image of nature refers to the figure of a mother. According to Gongutree Gogoi, “The Mother nature who is a provider, protector and giver of life is raped by the patriarchal anthropogenic activities of the society. It is said that man is to culture and woman is to nature. Thus the culture of modernization has destroyed the treasure of Mother Nature” (G. Gogoi 199). Like the image of nature being exploited, women are also suffering from exploitation within the society. In this way, Temsula Ao uses a powerful poetic imagery to compare the body of a woman and its violation with the exploitation of the forest.

In the short story “Laburnam for my Head” in *Laburnam for my Head*, Lentina’s obsession with the laburnum tree resonates throughout the story. Her longing to have a laburnum tree planted at her grave shows her resistance to the traditional practices. Lentina frees herself from the social construct of the society by choosing her grave site before her death. This act also reveals that she frees herself from the patriarchal authority by rejecting the already marked space beside her husband’s grave. Here, one may observe that Lentina is weighted with a dual relationship, one with society (man) and one with nature. She chooses nature which confirms the validity of the statement of Gongutree Gogoi that man is to culture and woman is to nature. Lentina does not hesitate to break the boundaries of her society despite insults from her husband and family members at gatherings in order to fulfil her own desire.

According to Sikhamoni Gogoi, “in the male biased world women and nature are often constructed through value dualism in disjunctive pair of words – reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature, and man/woman – where the two words of each pair are seen as oppositional rather than complementary” (S. Gogoi 1). Here, the first word of each pair connotes to the male which is considered to be superior to the latter. Hence, women are seen to be often rooted in nature, emotionally and physically as exemplified in the life of Lentina. Lentina finds homely anchor in nature. For people like Lentina, home is not just a house, it means assurance and satisfaction. Likewise, we often notice Temsula Ao finding her refuge in nature, and it is not surprising that she titled her first collection of stories, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006). However, the irony lies in the fact that these stories reflect a troubled land where war and insurgency took its toll over the people, which is very contrary to the concept of what home really signifies.

Homi Bhabha uses the term “unhomely” which does not mean homelessness, “unhomely” refers to the displacement of the idea of home. Bhabha uses the term “to refer to the estranging sense of the relocation of the home in an unhallowed place” (Bhabha 143). It refers to an estranged sense of partially belonging yet threatening. Somewhat similar to this, we find that characters in Temsula Ao’s work long for a

feeling of 'home' while at the time remaining rooted to their homeland. This sense of alienation is often seen as a cultural construct among the people affected who realise that identity begins with the claiming of land as home. In her memoir *Once Upon a Time*, Temsula Ao recalls, "Once again the old feeling of being 'homeless' began to overwhelm me and I finally gave in, consoling myself that I would at least have a 'home' of my own at last" (Ao, *Once Upon* 167). Jonathan Rutherford in his article "A Place called Home" describes 'not belonging' as "a sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally 'out of touch' with the world" (Rutherford 9). He explains that unless one is at peace with oneself, one cannot attain this feeling of 'belongingness.' He further says that, "Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognised – this is home, this is belonging" (Rutherford 9). Therefore, in relating to this notion of belongingness, the feeling of home marks an important factor in re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity because in the light of the views of Homi Bhabha and Jonathan Rutherford, unless one attains the feeling of belonging, a feeling of home, one cannot truly locate one's identity. The realization of one's identity begins with the realization of home. For the Ao-Naga woman, home may be in the form of the physical land Nagaland, or nature, or a status in the society or a state of mind.

The realization of identity is also driven by various ideologies which are present in every society. Re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity would be incomplete without considering the dominant ideology that had already been defined in the early part of this chapter. Here we can see that dominant ideology may have been formed within the Ao tradition or may have been imbibed from the western culture through education, religion or political influences, or it may have been formed by fusing the two. Such dominant ideologies hold strict governance among the Ao-Nagas and serve as an important factor in determining the dominant power and the oppressed. Stephen Morton shares the views of Antonio Gramsci who emphasised that "dominant ideological institutions such as political parties, the church, education, the media and bureaucracy also play an important role in maintaining relations to ruling" (Morton 65). As such, *Arju*, *Tsuki*, church, schools, the underground forces, the Indian government – all play an important role in framing the dominant ideology in

Ao-Naga society or among the Nagas in general. On the other hand, Louis Althusser rejects the notion of ideology as a “distortion or manipulation of reality by the ruling class.” (qtd. in Barrett 30). He stresses ideology as “lived experience”, as representing “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence, and that individual subjects are constructed and reproduced in ideology” (qtd. in Barrett 30).

In the olden times, the Ao-Naga tribe shared the same ideology with regard to their identity formations as mentioned in the earlier chapters formulated on the myth of Lungterok. They followed animism under which they believed the same spiritual ideology handed over to future generations through oral tradition. However, traces of cultural hegemony are predominant among the Naga tribes mainly due to the advent of the colonizers, the Christian missionaries, westernization and modernization. According to the Marxist philosophy, cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society. This can be related to the Ao-Naga belief system, customary laws, values, norms and mores. The Ao-Naga society like all other colonized societies fall victim to cultural hegemony of the West. The influence of the colonial hegemony debunks their ancestral ideologies including their belief system. The first of the ideologies to be discussed is the Christian ideology. The Christian ideology replaced animism, the new religion inculcated the notion that the Nagas were sinners, dirty and uncivilised and could only be saved by the Christian belief. As a method to establish this colonial hegemony, the colonizers established churches and mission schools. Christianity came in handy for the expansionist ideology of the colonizers. The Christian ideology became an integral part of the Nagas, it became a window to modernity and westernization which created new cultural aspirations among the people.

Another prominent ideology in the Ao-Naga society is patriarchal ideology. Patriarchal ideology limits the status of women and expects women to be subservient to men. This has limited women to develop in the field of education, government jobs and from attaining higher post in institutions. Temsula Ao writes, “For centuries

Naga society existed on the strength of male superiority and male prerogatives” (Ao, *On Being* 46). Although the biological difference of the sexes is unquestioned, this has led to a great degree of divergence in gender roles in traditional societies and as also seen in the Ao-Naga society. Therefore, one may observe how patriarchal ideology becomes gender biased and this prevents women from reaching their full potential in the society. Regarding this, Raymond Guess remarks that ideology can become a form of “motivation of propping up an oppressive form of power. If the motivation is unconscious, then this will involve a degree of self-deception on the part of those who adhere to the beliefs” (Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* 43). In this way, patriarchal ideology can be seen as a negative form of oppression towards the women. Ideology in this sense can be used to “help legitimate an unjust form of power” (Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* 43). Although one may argue that the patriarchal dominance provided security and assurance to the women, a question arises what if the Ao-Naga society was free of patriarchy, in which case it is likely that women would be capable of rising to the level of the men folk given the same education, responsibility and place in the administration.

The dominant ideology of conservatism is also seen in the Naga society. Conservatism may be understood as commitment to the traditional values, ideas, customary laws in opposition to change or innovation. In 1969, Nagaland saw its first women contesting the Assembly polls – Ravole U and R.L. Kinghen – however both lost. In 1977, Rano M. Shaiza became the first Naga woman to be elected as member of the Lok Sabha. Even today, women participation in politics in Nagaland is minimal. The 33% reservation for women under Article 243(T) of the Indian constitution has been strongly opposed by Nagaland. After a long legal battle by women’s group led by Naga Mothers Association (NMA) in Nagaland, in February 2017, the state government announced it would hold the urban local body (ULB) polls with 33% reservation for women. Despite the constitutional guarantee, this stirred up loud and violent opposition by Naga tribal groups on the grounds that the reservation went against the customary laws protected under Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution giving special provisions to Nagaland. The opposition which led to violent reaction and chaos ultimately forced the then Chief Minister TR Zeliang to

step down. The state government not only rejected the reservation but further requested the Centre to pass an ordinance to exempt Nagaland with regards to women's reservation. This situation in Nagaland reflects what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels had theorised in *The German Ideology* (1845) that "The ideas of the ruling class are, in any age, the ruling ideas." This current situation in Nagaland regarding the opposition to reservation for women in politics is the clear reflection of how "the dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class" (Abercrombie et al. 29), where in, the opposition comes from the tribal administration that consists of solely male members who formed the dominant class in Nagaland.

One may argue that "not every body of belief which people commonly termed ideological is associated with a dominant political power" (Eagleton 6). Regarding the issue of reservation for women, the Naga poet and journalist Monalisa Chankija, editor of the newspaper *Nagaland Page* expressed her strong opinion against such oppositions in an interview: "In Naga society, women are always expected to play the subservient role and inevitably women do so. The patriarchal ethos are dominant and embedded in women's psyches. It is sad that 'keeping the peace' within the home and the tribe becomes more important and imperative than gender justice" (Das 1).

Since the Naga society is devoid of women representation in the political platform, the interest of women in politics has declined and they often vote for whomever the authoritarian male of their family dictates them to vote. Thus, role of the women in the political platform is not only devoid of an elected women representative, but is rather passive and aloof. A fair representation of women could perhaps generate some political interest among the Naga women. Nancy Burns argues that "visible women in politics might function as role models and carry a kind of symbolic significance – sending the message to women citizens that politics is an inclusive domain, open to them" (Burns et al. 351). In the case of Nagaland, elections are very expensive. This could be one problem for women aspirants, even if they wanted representation, for the cost of representation is based on their economic

status in their society. Since the control of the family wealth is the purview of the male, a woman by no means can compete with the male candidates.

According to the Nagaland State Election Commission, the highest number of women candidates in Nagaland State Assembly Elections was in the year 2008 with 4 women candidates, but this is just a mere token number when compared to the 214 male candidates fielded the same year, moreover, none of the four women candidates were elected. This clearly reflects the status of women in politics, and the views of the society at large that does not favour women as legislators. This point is further exposed in a research dissertation conducted by Imtilemla Jamir titled *Naga Customary and Traditional Laws Affecting Naga Women in Decision Making* (2018), wherein we find that when it comes to women representation in politics in Nagaland, 87% of women state that they do not have equal representation in politics, on the contrary, 56% of men believe that women are given equal representation. From the statistics above, it is evident that the view of men in this matter is biased because Naga politics in the history of Nagaland has witnessed less women representation. Moreover, the research also reveals that 48% of men respondents are of the view that women are not capable of competing with men in politics, whereas 88% females are of the view that they are capable.

Till today, many aspects of life in Nagaland are still governed by the customary laws and practices. These laws and practices are the reasons why women are still excluded in the political administration and governance. The circumstances witnessed in Nagaland find an echo in the statements made in “Redstockings Manifesto” where it reads, “Men have controlled all political, economic and, and cultural institutions and backed up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from the male supremacy. All men have oppressed women” (qtd. in Hooks 69). In the case of Naga society, although such forms of oppression may not necessarily be physical, men are indeed directly or indirectly involved in the oppression of women as long as they enjoy the privileges of their male status under patriarchy. Naga tradition, over the years has limited women's role

within the family by conforming to the dominant ideology of conservatism. The exclusion of women in the religious platform also remains the same since the days of its transition from animism to Christianity. Today, Pastors and the Deacon Boards comprise of all male members, and women at most can only aspire up to the status of Associate Pastor. Temsula Ao challenges the Naga women to stand up and believe in themselves and recognize their right as a Naga.

“The exclusion of Naga women from institutions of power is determined by cultural traditions that have governed Naga Society for centuries and to overhaul the system would be a revolution of far greater implications than the one launched to attain ‘independence’ from the Indian State (Ao, *On Being* 52).

One may rightly question as to why the Naga women do not raise a strong voice in protest for more recognition or inclusion. Why do they not take initiatives? The answer is simple - to raise their voice or protest against any customary law would be to challenge the whole structure of the society from the base, i.e. the village polity. Moreover, if a woman protests, the society will then turn to her brother, father, clansmen etc regarding the honour of the family. So far, it appears to be an impossible to raise a protesting voice and go through the risks of putting their family at stake.

Many feminists have posed dominant ideology as central to women’s oppression. Material conditions have historically structured the mental aspects of oppression. Since the Ao woman cannot possess or inherit landed property or any other valuable wealth solely under her name, this means that in terms of material wealth she has no value in the society. And if the statement “he who dominates material production controls mental production too” (Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* 79) is to be taken into consideration, then women in the Ao-Naga society have little or no control nor contribution to the mental production in their society as well. In *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (2012), Terry Eagleton further elaborates the economic base or infrastructure which forms the economic structure of society. He states that “from this economic base, in every period, emerges a

superstructure” (Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* 5). According to him, the superstructure is what forms the political, religious and economic ideology. In the light of the Marxist study, one may explain the social mentality on the status of women in the Ao-Naga society which remains subordinate to men because it is the men who control the economic production.

Louis Althusser states that in modern capitalism, the main factor in forming the dominant ideology among the people is the educational system. Michelle Barrett shares the same views that “schools take children and drill them in the ruling ideology” (Barrett 116). Likewise, Antonio Gramsci says that the task of the school is the production of intellectuals. Here, the intellectuals form the dominant group in governances and hence are the people responsible for forming or influencing the dominant ideologies of that time. In the Ao-Naga society, children were made to attend mission schools where they were introduced to new colonial ideologies of the rulers, and the institution of *Arju* was replaced. Moreover, the female child was deprived of higher studies as society restricted them to the household. Hence, a female child had lesser opportunity than a male child in the Naga society. When the male child completes his education to a certain level, he emerges as an agent of exploitation, agent of repression or professional ideologists due to the fact that he is now empowered to hold a privileged position.. A female child cannot aspire to that position because her education is already limited in the first place. In this way, the educational system among the Nagas becomes a means of production of discrimination against the women. However, Naga women writers today have been able to express themselves through their creative works, and the feminist movement articulating women’s right has gained momentum over the years. The late arrival of this movement is often attributed to the fact that most Naga mothers and grandmothers of the older generation were illiterate, uneducated and unaware of their rights. The fact that the sensitization of gender and equity is linked with education is relevant and true for the Naga scenario. It was due to the lack of education that women belonging to the older generations were deprived of their own individual rights.

Such being the case, the educated male has taken up much of the higher offices of administration giving them more power. This notion goes along with the statement given by Ann Marie Wolpe in *Some Processes in Sexist Education* (1977) that, “the educational system is a key means of the production and reproduction of the ideological structure and that it embodies the dominant ideology in its organization” (Wolpe 2-3). According to Wolpe, the educational system has a direct relation to the division of labour based on gender. The division of labour that starts within the family is carried over to the societal set up as well. Thus in the case of the Nagas, when the division of labour during the old Naga society confined women to the household chores, over the years, this division of labour still reflects in the societal governances, employment and in administration. In this way, the woman often occupies the secondary sector of the labour market. This is because a woman is considered lacking in the “basic training in the skills and qualifications appropriate to the concrete division of labour, and the transmission of ideologies” (Barrett 118). Their lower status in the division of labour compels them to become subordinate to the men. Wolpe concludes that, “the education system is too closely linked with the division of labour in society, as are ideologies which legitimate this structure” (Wolpe 18). Hence, the regulation of education between the genders plays an important role in structuring the different opportunities of men and women as employed labour force.

The one thing remarkable about the Naga society was their unity in their political ideology dating from the 1950's when the people came together for a unified movement for political independence. Political ideology in this sense may be understood to symbolize social movement, which, in the case of the Naga people, was to attain freedom and independence from India. When Nagaland was annexed to the province of Assam after the Independence of India in 1947, nationalist activities arose amongst a section of the Nagas demanding a political union of their ancestral and native groups. This movement led to an ideological consciousness among the Nagas of their sovereignty accompanied by underground movement and insurgency. In one of the short stories, “The Jungle Major” in *These Hills Called Home*, it is

found that the whole village participated in this nationalist movement for the sovereignty of land.

It was after a year or so of Khatila's marriage that the entire land was caught in the new wave of patriotic fervour that swept the imagination of the people and plunged them into a struggle, which many did not even understand (*These Hills* 2-3).

This political ideology touched them to the core, and even though there were some who did not quite understand the movement, they nonetheless participated as it was an issue that dominated the mindset of the majority of the Naga people.

The subject of independence became public talk; young people spoke of the exploit of their peers in encounters with government forces and were eager to join the new band of patriotic warriors to liberate their homeland from foreign rule (Ao, *These Hills* 3).

The independence movement was gaining momentum by the day and even the remotest villages were getting involved, if not directly in terms of their members joining the underground army, then certainly by paying 'taxes' to the underground 'government' (Ao, *These Hills* 25-26).

It is evident that this movement triggered intense feeling of nationalism. The nationalist ideology became the dominant ideology during this time for the Nagas. According to Smith, nationalism is "an ideology and movement characterized by the promotion of the interests of a particular nation" (Smith 25), especially with the aim of gaining and maintaining the nation's sovereignty (self-governance) over its homeland. Hewasa and Venusa Tinyi points out that a new self awareness of being Nagas was "triggered by the rise and spread of nationalism in the different parts of the world in the first half of the 20th Century" (Yanthan et al. 2) With this nationalism, Nagaland fought to govern itself, free from outside interference in order to maintain a single national identity sharing a singular history. However, this movement was strongly countered by the government forces which cost the lives of the thousands of families amidst terror and violence. When Nagaland gained

statehood in 1963, nationalism still formed the dominant ideology. However, because of the thirst for power and corruption among themselves, trouble is not abated and different factions were formed by the underground groups which divided the very cause of the nationalist movement. Today, Nagaland is still struggling to re-capture the idealistic fervour with which their struggle had begun and which has not yet been resolved till date. Regarding this, Temsula Ao comments:

Nagaland's story of the struggle for self determination started with high idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment because it became the very thing it sought to overcome (Ao, *These Hill x*).

As already mentioned, the nationalist movement was immediately followed by violence and terror. Violence became a direct result of parties/armies claiming power over one another. In the midst of such troubled times, the civilians became the direct victims, more so, the women in the society. Women have often been silent sufferers in times of war, this has often been the case with regard to different regions of the world which underwent similar conflicts. The Naga women underwent physical abuse, rape, torture, threats as well as mental torture. It is out of these sufferings that a generation of women, the educated Naga women writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire, Monalisa Chankija and Nini Lungalang have taken to literature to raise voice for the silent sufferers and to spread awareness on the rights of the Naga women. Recently, a book entitled *The Place of Women in Naga Society*, published in 2018 brought together by Naga women from seventeen tribes projecting the traditional concept on women and the transitions they undergo through the passage of time. This book is the first attempt of its kind published by Naga Women's Union in strengthening the role of the Naga women. On reading the works of such Naga women writers as the above and others, it is evident that these writers advocate a feminist movement speaking out against inequality, injustice of patriarchy, the biased nature of the customary laws and fighting for their rights so that the identity and dignity of being a Naga woman may be re-imagined to a new level. It is with this notion that Temsula Ao writes in her poem "The Creator,"

Until one-day
 The true self
 Of the woman in me
 Declared.
 “I am a woman,
 And woman creates.
 Therefore
 I shall create
 The real me
 And a brave new world” (Ao, *Book of Songs* 129).

The above lines echo how adamant Temsula Ao is in not only giving voice, but encouraging others to overcome certain barriers. With these lines, she reassures her readers that women are capable of re-creating themselves and their own identity in a new world.

When we talk of a new world, one can take note of how the social environment of the society at large has also changed as well. Today, the traditional occupation of agricultural work has gradually been replaced by government and private jobs. The society as a whole has come a long way due to globalization and modernity and today, more educated women have taken up their roles in government sectors, entrepreneurship, and other private jobs which require them to reside in towns and cities, and commute to work places. However, the fact that women have taken up such jobs does not free them of their household responsibilities. These women have to fulfil both their responsibilities which means double work load. The plight of women in the domestic web is captured by Temsula Ao in her poem “The Creator,”

Struggling to preserve,
 The self from dissolving.
 Into a domestic web
 And from becoming
 The nameless half

Of the entire man” (Ao, *Book of Songs* 129).

Meanwhile, the men remain free of such household duties. Regardless of their economic contribution, women are still far from attaining an equitable position as men. Till today, no matter how educated the woman is, she still cannot be the decision maker in the family. Since the institutions in the society are still predominantly occupied and controlled by the men, she remains vulnerable to gender discrimination and subordination. Although the status of the tribal women in the Northeast region is comparatively better to that of their counterparts in mainland India, Tiplut Nongbri shares her opinion that, “tribal women are not absolutely subordinated and possess greater economic and freedom of movement than their counterparts in non-tribal cannot be disputed. But it would be naive to regard this as an indicator of their superior social status. Evidence suggests that even hunting societies women were mostly treated as “second sex” with greater lesser subordination to men” (Nongbri 200).

In her series of poem “A Village Morning,” “A Village Morning II” and “A Village Morning III” from *Book of Song: Collected Poems 1988-2007*, Temsula Ao recounts the daily morning routine of the Naga women. She narrates how “the day awaits her with myriad chores”(Ao, *Book of Songs* 181). In the poem, the woman starts her day by fetching water in the forest stream, preparing the morning meal for her family, all the while tending to the pigs and chickens. Temsula Ao writes how the woman, as a mother also has to tend to her wailing child as she stirs the rice. She goes on to write of how the husband, rather than being appreciative, only complains about the meal that is prepared for him.

The man at his meal mumbles,
 His morning ritual
 ‘Too much salt in the curry’
 The woman ignores him
 In return ritual (Ao, *Book of Songs* 183).

In the next poem “A Village Morning II,” Temsula Ao continues the complaints of the husband who “curses the embers into hesitant flames” (184). Even though the husband is aware of the demanding morning rituals of the wife, he remains inconsiderate.

He knows these are not
 A man’s job and begins
 To curse his wife
 For leaving him so helpless
 In a woman’s place (Ao, *Book of Songs* 184).

From what we can glean from the above lines is the great divide witnessed in the life of both men and women. The husband refrains from engaging in any of the household chores because it is considered to be a “woman’s place.”

In the poem “A Village Morning III,” Temsula Ao depicts the life of an orphaned girl who is “showered with constant abuse and given little sustenance” (187). The girl has to wake up in the darkness of a cold winter morning to fetch water for fear of her stepmother’s threat, “Before I get up in the morning / Make sure all the water containers are full / Or else...” In this poem, one may observe that oppression does not necessarily come from the male alone. Here, the stepmother becomes the source of threat and abuse, however, the father is also at fault for remaining passive in the stepmother/daughter relation. In many of the Ao-Naga folklore, stepmothers often mistreated the children. In “Myths and Tales in the Oral Tradition” from *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999), Temsula Ao narrates how the boy who turned into a monkey was ill-treated by his stepmother. The stepmother assigned him difficult chores and started giving him less food. It was because of the stepmother’s ill-treatment and starvation that the boy had transformed into a monkey. Similarly, in the story of two orphans who became rich through the help of supernatural powers, the stepmother was very cruel to them and treated them in an inhuman manner. The two sisters ran away because their stepmother had set them an impossibly hard task which they had to finish by sundown. In folklore such as these,

women also become oppressors and source of abuse to their fellow gender and also to children.

The discussion in this chapter emphasizes the importance of ideology in the construction of the status of the Ao-Naga woman in the society. The socially constructed gender biased ideology reduces women as the 'second sex.' Simone Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997) says, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" (295). This principle alludes to the notion of women that is brought about by societal and physiological conditioning. With the pretext of preserving traditional laws and customs, women are deprived of their rights and are automatically compelled into a subordinate status. Unless these customary laws and practices are revised keeping in mind the issues of equality and human rights, it would be next to impossible for the Naga women to attain equal rights as men. In the dissertation submitted by Imtilemla Jamir already referred to earlier, the study points out that 72% of women are of the view that there is a need for customary law in Nagaland, 86% of men are also of the view that customary laws are needed. 28% female and 13% male think that there is no need for customary laws in Nagaland (I. Jamir 15). Based on the current statistics, it is evident that the customary laws still have a strong standing in the Naga society and that majority of the people, both men and women support the continuance of these laws. The study also reveals that women are much more aware of the biased nature of the customary laws. "61% of female believe that customary law does not impart equality while 63% men believe that customary laws impart equality" (I. Jamir 15).

Although few Naga women writers have taken initiatives towards empowering women through their works, it also needs the support not only of women, but also of men as well. In order to attain gender equality, the whole society has to take part in it. According to Kamla Basin, attaining gender equality "requires each one of us, man and women, to look into ourselves and overcome our negative 'male' (being aggressive, domineering, competitive, self-centred) and 'female' (being submissive, fearful, difficult) qualities" (Basin 83).

In an essay “Gender and Power: Women-Centred Narratives from Ao-Naga Folklore” from *On Being a Naga: Essays*, Temsula Ao compares how women are often projected as the weaker sex under patriarchy to how women are portrayed as an embodiment of power of a different kind in myths, legends and folklore. The Ao-Naga folktale does not show Ao-Naga women warriors, heroines or queens. However, Temsula Ao points out how “in certain narratives from folklore, one can see a subtle reversal of role and subversion” (Ao, *On Being* 71) of the patriarchal power structure. Although the Ao-Naga society is solely patriarchal, Temsula Ao writes, “in their [the Ao-Naga] folklore there are numerous women centred narratives which depict women as the dominant characters wielding power which traditionally belongs to man” (Ao, *On Being* 71). This concept of reversal of the traditional power-structure based on gender is further illustrated by Temsula Ao through four narratives from Ao-Naga folklore. One of these stories tell about Longkongla, a spinster who possessed supernatural powers. Her son Ozukumer was born out of a bird’s feather. The villagers became jealous of them because of their prosperous life and plotted to kill her son. Ozukumer was drowned in the river by the villagers. Longkongla was so angry that she avenged her son’s death by killing all the children of the village. She was helped to escape by her supernatural allies and was pulled by a thin cord towards the sky. Unfortunately, Longkongla fell and died. The second narrative is about a woman called Akangla who helped the Longkhum warriors in fighting the ferocious dogs who fought with the Nokrang warriors. Her witty advice of luring the dogs with sticky rice with strands of hair inserted in them helped the Longkhum warriors to kill their enemies and dogs easily. It is said that the Longkum warriors regarded Akangla as their benefactress and even called her a ‘Wise Woman.’ Another tale depicts the character of Yajangla who possessed supernatural powers and could transform herself into a tigress. Temsula Ao writes, “She could also conjure spirits and perform miracles” (Ao, *On Being* 75). However, her story became tragic as she was forced to reveal her secret by her husband. Although she warned him of the possible fatal consequences, the husband compelled her, and in doing so, she transformed into a tigress and ate her husband who was no match for the superhuman power. The fourth story is about a woman who has no name. This woman broke her husband’s favourite *dao* which he warned was never to be touched

by her. However, she prepared her husband's favourite curry and received him in a flirtatious mood. After they were in bed, the wife confessed to the husband but the husband dismissed the matter as he was "in a state of intense passion at the moment" (Ao, *On Being* 79).

The story of Longkongla, Akangla and Yajangla are examples of how women display a reversal of role or subversion from the male dominated world. Akangla's intellectual wisdom surpassed the physical power and weaponry of the Longkhum warriors. The last narrative shows how women often employ their power of feminine sexuality over men as a strategy for survival in a man's world. Women often use their sexuality to resist and subvert the domination of male power. However, the observations made here are based only on the Ao-Naga folklore. Even though the above women are projected in folklore as dominant characters and superior to men, in reality the image of the Ao women continue to be projected as a weaker sex under the patriarchal system. Regarding this gap between the portrayal of women in folklore and the actual status of women in reality, Temsula Ao comments,

In actual reality, in this society, women are considered to be of little or no significance in matters relating to the origin, history and civic life of the people. But in the "fictive reality" of these narratives, women have been portrayed as re-appropriating the powers men actually wield in real life (Ao, *On Being* 80).

The expressions of male dominance over women under patriarchy is evident in the study, given that the institutions such as family, schools and government organizations still strongly favour male privileges. In order to take a step forward to end women oppression, it is important to dissociate the patriarchal ideological values from the economic relations where women are considered dependent on men, and a re-division of labour and responsibilities starting from the family to higher institutes and government. The struggles met by the Ao-Naga women align with the struggles of women throughout the world. There can be no women's emancipation without socialism, at the same time there can be no socialism without women's

emancipation. Barbara Berg in *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (1979) emphasises the need for women to gain greater individual freedom:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from x-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action . . . the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgement (qtd. in Hooks 25).

The points made by Barbara Berg in the above lines align with the points which Temsula Ao incorporates in her works. Lifting the burden of domestic labour, equal opportunities, employment and inclusion in the governance and administration will re-define the status and identity of women. Having said that, although the public is aware that the various dominant ideologies dealt with in the chapter are agents of women's oppression in the Ao-Naga society, protesting against it still does not seem viable, at least in the near future because of the strong opposition by the dominant male power. Only a handful of women Naga writers have sought literary discourse as a means of articulating their expressions towards feminist concerns. The media has also played an important role in spreading this awareness about gender equality. Although one cannot expect sudden and drastic changes, it does not mean that defying patriarchal dominance, breaking gender-stereotypical roles, restructuring ideological constructs and inclusion of women in the political and administrative parameters are unattainable. On a more positive note, based on the research conducted on the youth of Nagaland carried out by Imtilemla Jamir, the findings shows that 63% of male respondents and 83% of female respondents support the 33% reservation for women in politics. Here, one may observe that modern ideologies and ideas among the youths have gradually become less conservative. Since the youth are the foundation of the future generation, this crucial research holds the possibility that change is at hand.

For a tribe to realise its identity and to assert itself to the rest of the world, it is crucial that all matters of doubt and confusion be settled at the grass root level covering all areas of life – social, political, economic etc. In the modern context, traditional customary laws need to be given a new structure so that it may be flexible

enough to adopt changes in its gender biased laws. This does not mean that the Nagas should discard their traditional and customary laws all together, doing that would mean discarding a crucial element of their identity, but having to embrace modernity and living in the 21st century, the time has come for them to syncretise the old traditions and customary laws with the new, and adopt ideologies that provide gender equity.

For the Ao-Nagas, on matters of re-imagining and reasserting their identity as a tribe, the identity and status of the women within their own tribe holds an important key in determining the status of the holistic identity of the tribe. A re-reading into the problem faced by women in terms of patriarchy and dominant ideologies among the Ao-Nagas questions the reluctance of the society in neglecting the need to take steps to solve the problem that is obvious and blatant. In coming to terms with the Ao-Naga identity, unless the women participate freely in the society and enjoy their rights in terms of decision making, equal opportunity in governance, education and social participation, the society will continue to face a lopsided gender equality, which might result in moving further away from attaining their desired Ao-Naga identity which Temsula Ao hopes to attain. It is an identity which offers mutually acceptable terms for both genders where all members of the society enjoy equal political and economic rights and thereby, attain honour as a tribe. Hence, the Ao-Naga community needs to adopt political and social ideas which will spread awareness about the ideals of socialism among its people. As of now, the status of the Ao-Naga women still remains subordinate to men in all spheres of life. Re-considering gender equality among the Ao-Nagas would lead to a positive development of the status of not only the women, but also the collective Ao-Naga community. The re-evaluation of the traditional customary laws and practices may take some time, nevertheless voices like Temsula Ao through her literary discourse has highlighted women's issues at hand and has challenged the gender biased system of patriarchal and dominant ideology which in due course of time has to be resolved. In the words of Temsula Ao,

Now I wait,
And wait,

Unencumbered
And nameless,
For new designations
(Ao, *Book of Songs* 91).

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In order to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity, this thesis has attempted to show how the Ao-Naga identity has come a long way from oral tradition to the present time. Being part of India, a nation with immense cultural diversity, Nagaland offers a unique identity that is different from the mainland India, yet closely similar to its neighbouring Northeast states. Even within Nagaland, the study has shown how diverse the Naga tribes are in terms of their customs, language, dress etc. The study has already identified the Nagas as honest and hard-working. Their history has shown them as an independent people living a peaceful life who foraged for their basic needs from the forests that surrounded them. Intertribal wars and inter village raids for various reasons was a common occurrence, so in this light, the tribe can also be seen contrary to the image of being simple and peaceful.

Moreover, their practice of headhunting was considered as bringing home a trophy to mark their victory and their heroism. It was due to headhunting practice that the Nagas were often regarded as “bloodthirsty, treacherous and revengeful” (Woodthrope 67). Nevertheless, the tribe remained a self sufficient whole adapting to the harsh yet abundant forests that surrounded them, their village equipped with a balanced administrative hierarchy that took care of the needs and security of its own tribe. The Ao-Naga tribe, the study of which has been taken up in this thesis, is one among the major tribes of Nagaland. Since the study involves the history, social conditions and political events that encompass the collective Naga tribe, the study oftentimes refers the Nagas interchangeably with the Ao-Nagas in the conduct of its study within the chapters of this thesis.

The study observes a difference in the perspective of writers in their approach as they pen down the history of the Naga. It is unfortunate that scholars and journalists writing from outside the Naga society often mistake or misrepresent the Nagas, they often see the Nagas as being hostile and unfriendly since they lack crucial internal insights of the Naga community. This thesis approaches the study of

the Ao-Naga identity through the lens of Temsula Ao, an insider who has a deep rooted connection with the land and its history. Her work portrays a vivid image of the life of the Nagas capturing the origin and history of the Nagas, from the pre-colonial period up to the present.

The study notes that initially the Nagas did not recognise themselves being labelled as Nagas. There was no common Naga identity. During the pre-colonial times, each Naga village remained independent of one another, and the villages identified themselves with their clan/tribe name. It was only after the advent of British colonialism that these tribes were given a homogeneous Naga identity. The colonisers and anthropologists often referred to the tribes inhabiting Naga Hills as 'Nagas' and as naked people. It was only after the wake of Naga nationalism that the collective tribes of Nagaland identified themselves as Nagas. The following political upheavals since the 1950s that preceded the nationalist movement further brought the tribes closer and the Naga identity gained its homogeneity over time.

The hill tribes in particular of Northeast India including Nagaland remained isolated for a long time prior to British colonization of the 19th Century in the region. Each tribe was independent in their village administration. The study traces the Ao-Naga tribe, their origin, history, specific cultural practices, village administration, religion and way of life. Initially, the Ao-Naga society depended and revolved around their rich oral tradition which acted as the governing body of their administration and social fabric. *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) by Temsula Ao offers a vast insight into the rich oral tradition, society and folk life, the concept of clan, family and village administration (*Putu Menden*), belief system, rituals, myths and tales, language and social customs of the Ao-Nagas. This book provides an insight into the old Ao-Naga tradition which holds the crucial base of their origin in which the study of this thesis is grounded.

In studying the works of Temsula Ao, one is able to understand how and why the Ao-Naga society underwent the various changes and transformations witnessed today, from the myth of the 'Lungterok' to contemporary times, wherein its society has arrived at a stage to be able to share the globalized worldview along with the rest

of the world. The study traces the origin myths of the Ao-Nagas to have originated out of six stones at Lungterok. Temsula Ao records the origin myth of the Aos in her first book *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999) and also in her poem, “Stone-People from Lungterok” in *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013). Alongside Temsula Ao, the study also incorporates the records as documented by L. Sosang Jamir’s in his book, *Ao Naga: Customary Laws and Practices* (2012) which consists of the customary laws, tradition and practices among the Ao-Nagas. When the all independent villages were finally annexed to the British Empire, the society immediately witnessed changes in their social fabric. The study traces the advent of the British colonizers, Christian missionaries and spread of western education as key factors which initiated the cultural transition and modernization among the Ao-Nagas.

The study further examines the fast spread of education which developed into reading and printing culture that brought about their passage from orality to literacy. The new formal education had its merit and demerits as well. While education provided development in terms of hygiene, economic and social progress, it also jeopardised the traditional social activities of the Naga people and influenced them to ape the white man’s lifestyle and values. The study locates education as the key milestone in moving the old Naga society towards modernity.

The study observes the shift of power from the hands of the native tribes who succumbed to the British rulers. The land eventually became part of India when India attained its independence from the British in 1947. With the power shifted from the British rulers to the Indian rulers, the Nagas developed their nationalist mindset to have a free and independent Nagaland which thus started their movement for self rule. This was followed by massive underground activities which led to the unending conflict between the Indian Army and the underground army. The study traces certain agents that triggered this resistance movement, one of which was education. The study observes how education opened the mind of the tribes, and somehow made them aware of how their identities were exploited and subordinated, how their rights were violated by the outside forces in their own land. In the poem, “A Strange Place,” Temsual Ao writes,

This world is a strange place
 Where people are
 Exiled in their own lands
 And imprisoned in their own minds (Ao, *Book of Songs* 13).

With the passage of time, the obsession with Naga politics and history, and the desire to learn more about their own identity became an important pursuit among the Naga educated class. This was when the drive for independence for a free Nagaland was the strongest among the people. This drive also caused the Nagas to reflect upon their own rich heritage that was passed on to them by their forefathers through their oral traditions. Hence, it was during these times that the attempt to preserve their nationalistic pride and identity became an important priority for them.

The various factors that affected the change within the society viz. Christianity, education, colonialism and modernization, resonate in the works of Temsula Ao, forming an underlying backdrop as she narrates the stories from the region. Although Christianity had its benefits, it also had its adverse effect on the people. Most of the animistic practices were abandoned with the advent of Christianity in 1872. Animism was eventually replaced by Christianity, and much of their songs, myths, folktales and lores were gradually discarded as pagan practices or pagan products. Even *madhu* or rice beer which served as an important part of public and religious events was prohibited. These abrupt prohibitions were noted by Mary Clark, the wife of the pioneer missionary E.W Clark, who writes, “Every form of demon worship, open or suspected, was attacked – Sunday-breaking, rice-beer drinking, licentiousness, and all social vices . . . singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation..” (qtd. in Yanthan 79).

However, since traditional practices are part of their cultural fabric, some of them are still retained even today. Thus, their beliefs in a way have become a blend of Christianity with the old Ao animism. Today, although the census of 2011 has recorded 87.93% Naga population as Christians, most of the people still follow certain customary practices. Although change is inevitable in all societies, the fact that much of their beliefs and tools for passing on their cultural values have been

considered inappropriate, and has ultimately resulted in a cultural disintegration. Their oral traditions are the repositories that contain the tribe's history of all important aspects of their social life including their migration, settlements, and heroic deeds. When this is belittled and rejected it means that the people have lost their crucial medium for preserving their identity and history.

The study observes the many ways on how colonialism had a huge impact on the lives of the Nagas. The village administration of the *Putu Menden* (village administration) gradually lost relevance and dissolved under the colonial rule. The village institution of the *Morung* and the *Tsuki* were replaced by the introduction of formal education and formal learning, thereby these new practices changed the social set up of the village. Madan Sarup explains in *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (1990) that this emergence of a new pattern of life created a new lifestyle, at the same time, it also generated isolation and loneliness among the people. This is because much of the old lifestyle and practices had a deep connection with their culture and contained crucial elements that determined their identity as a tribe or as a Naga. By discarding their old practices and adopting the new alien lifestyle, the people lost an integral part of their old tradition; hence in the process, the transformation generated a disconnect, a loss, and a yearning for home, and home for the Naga is rooted in their land and tradition. This factor can be traced in the works of Temsula Ao where the people are stripped of their old traditions and compelled to adopt a lifestyle which is new to them. Thus, the people are left stranded in an empty space where their very identity and origin is questioned by the new teachings and lifestyle. The white man's ideology brainwashed the people into thinking that whatever practices and customs they had earlier followed were now considered as backward and primitive. Hence, the study also delves into how colonialism contributed to a major transformation of the Ao-Naga history and identity.

On re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity, it may be concluded that the present Ao-Nagas have not all together discarded their old traditional identity, but that there is a striking balance between their old tradition and the new. The study has viewed this synthesis of the old and the new in the light of Homi Bhabha's 'hybridity'. Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) explains cultural differences as being

based on hybridities created in moments of historical transformation. Therefore, in the light of the concept of hybridity, the identity of the Naga people gradually underwent change through the experiences that the people gained from outside influences. The cultural identity of the Naga people may thus be described as a hybrid of sort, containing both old traditions and the new practices brought about by the new order of Christianity, modernity and education. The poem, “Blood of Other Days” clearly captures the transition which the land has gone through, where most of the traditions which form the essence of the Naga identity had been discarded by the alien belief system and teachings.

Stripped of all our basic certainties
 We strayed from our old ways
 And let our soul-mountain recede
 Into a tiny ant-hill and we

Schooled our minds to become
 The ideal tabula rasa
 On which the strange intruders
 Began scripting a new history.

We stifled our natural articulations
 Turned away from our ancestral gods
 And abandoned accustomed rituals
 Beguiled by the promise of a new heaven.

We borrowed their minds,
 Aped their manners,
 Adopted their gods
 And became perfect mimics (Ao, *Books of Songs* 297).

As much as transition has taken place in various corners of the society, the one thing that remains consistent among the Naga tribe is their connection with nature. The study in the works of Temsula Ao reveals how the people and their

activities revolved around their surrounding, their land i.e. nature. Nature remains the crucial backdrop to every activity of the tribe and the historical significance nature provided remains an important factor in tracing their origin, as in the poem “Stone people from Lungterok.” Since the Naga history is based on oral tradition, it is impossible to draw a fixed line to support the myths of origin, however the myths of the Lungterok has been accepted by majority of the people as an inalienable principle of their tribal history. According to the Naga ethos, their land is part of them, and they are only claiming ownership to what was initially and already theirs’. This close relation of the tribe with their immediate ecological surrounding opens an area of further study in the light of ecocriticism. Nature is intrinsically interwoven into their identities. For the Nagas, nature is not just a source of sustenance but more of an extension of identity and roots. Thus, harm to nature immediately affects their identity. Since their very existence and historic origin was aligned with the land and nature, they experienced a strong sense of alienation when the missionaries debunked their beliefs of worship in nature. Today, they have been able to accept their new belief system due to the fact that they have worked out a space for their continued link with the land and nature that does not compromise their old traditional belief.

The study has found that women in Naga society witness a less privileged status in their society. This is because the Naga society is a patriarchal society where all decisions and ownerships belong to the male. However, the study shows that Naga women have greater freedom than women of highly conservative cultures elsewhere in India. They enjoy easier access to education and freedom in terms of economic activities. The status of the women in the Naga tribe was studied under different perspectives, one is that in the olden days, men would undertake all the heavy activities like hunting for food, protecting the village from enemies and wild animals, and taking care of the overall welfare of their village. The study observes that this was practiced only to exempt the women and children from hard work and not with the motive to claim power about them. The division of labour also maintained a balance within the society where the men took care of the village as a whole, and the women tended to their household and children. However, such practices deprived women’s participation in almost all the important decisions of the

village/family and inheritance, thus making them vulnerable to a gender biased patriarchy. Today, with the increase in the number of educated women, the gender biased patriarchy has started to be questioned and women have started to question the system which has limited their opportunities. Earlier, women meekly accepted the power of patriarchy, and their honour had been defined by being silent, their submissive behaviour and conforming to the values revered by the society. Hence, the study observes how the system which has been accepted for such a long time as normal can no longer be accepted especially in the modern context.

A study on the short stories of Temsula Ao also depicts bold and witty women characters who have participated in times of crucial decision makings and problem solving. This study observes how the status of women is gradually breaking from the traditional status of being subordinate or just a property of the man. However, in the contemporary times there are still no women representations in the modern political set up in Nagaland which shows that although women have the rightful constitutional reservation as an Indian woman to participate in the political system, they still do not have enough support from the public, more so as they continue to face opposition from the men. The 33% reservation of women in Nagaland is a perfect example of the situation of women in the political hierarchy. Temjensosang wrote that even the Nagaland Government confessed that implementing the law of reservation “would have negative impact on Naga society, so as to disintegrate the same and weaken the strong administration of Naga way of life” (19).

An important remedy that is evident in the course of this study in order to uplift the status of the women is education. If women are educated, the awareness of their rights in the Indian constitution may be exercised in their society as well as their work place. In order for the tribe to claim a holistic and inclusive identity, giving equal importance to both genders is essential. Therefore, to re-imagine the status of women is a requirement in order to re-imagine one’s identity as a tribe. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, the former President of India remarked, “Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating good nation; when women are empowered, society with stability is assured” (Temjensosang 2). He further stressed on the role which women

empowerment has on the family, society and nation. The study of this thesis has observed how women through education have gradually helped themselves to achieve a certain status in the society, but in the case of the Ao-Naga till today, family decision making and inheritance still excludes them to have such male privileges as that of men.

The study observes that the Naga identity finds difficulty in aligning itself as an Indian citizen. The reasons are many, such as the stark difference which is not only race related, but also related to culture, lifestyle, and food habits. Moreover, the political turmoil during the time of political conflict since the 1950s has greatly affected the collective Naga psyche. This period may be considered as the most traumatic and life-changing experience in recent history for the Naga people. Even though the political conflicts brought about cultural disintegration as pointed out in the study, it also ironically integrated and united the people through Naga patriotism. One may observe how the whole village participated in this nationalist movement. Temsula Ao reveals in one of her short stories how not everybody who joined this movement understood the real motive of the nationalist movement, but were nonetheless affected directly or indirectly. Their involvement may be direct by joining the underground movement or indirectly by paying taxes/donation to the underground movement. Even though the motivation to fight for an independent Nagaland started with a unified sense of nationalism for sovereignty, however, with insurgency that continued to terrorize the people, their initial shared ideology became divided overtime. Often a time, the underground army would impose heavy taxes too, or would be involved with the village to the extent where the village itself triggered suspicion from the Indian Army, and the whole village community would suffer, or have their village burnt. Moreover, the villagers too were often bribed to conduct certain errands in favour of the army. Temsula Ao points out that Naga nationalism at the initial stage started with a unified motive, however in the course of time became divided and resulted in violent factionalism amongst themselves. This eventually led to a pseudo nationalism which further resulted in the societal disintegration wherein the enemy was not only the external forces but was from within themselves.

The Naga people today can be said to have a dual identity of being Naga and Indian, all the while being influenced by the forces of globalization. Hence, the Ao-Naga society too may be seen today as a hybrid of both the old Naga identity and of the modern identity. A study of this hybrid identity in the light of what Homi Bhabha termed 'hybridity,' one can observe that the Nagas have not totally discarded their old traditions, nor have they adopted the new completely, but have fused the two resulting in a transformed or modified version of both the old and the new. The works of Temsula Ao also show the benefits of such transformation and how it has brought about a better change in the society. Her point is made clear in her writings that she does not want to discard the rich oral traditions, folksongs and their deep relation with nature but rather to revive it for future generations. As of now, we cannot say that the Naga identity has been resolved and arrived at a fixed point, because such changes are dynamic and flexible. The land and its people continued to be subjected to transition and change through the ongoing experience with, and influenced of, globalization.

The gradual departure from their old traditions has indeed posed questions about their identity, but the same education that ironically distanced them from their oral traditions has now become an equally important factor in driving the Nagas to want to return to their roots. They have taken up the process of reviving and retrieving their pre-colonial past by retaining many of their cultural practices and beliefs as already dealt with earlier, and through the medium of their literature that provides a platform for the expression of their ongoing resistance to the belittling of their culture, as well as nostalgia for the values of their past. Every society has in their own way undergone changes and transition, no society can do away with changes or else it would fail to thrive, and become static and dead. The factors which bring about changes differ in each society, nevertheless change is inevitable. The question lies on how much impact that process of change have on the society in question.

In the case of the Ao-Naga, the process of change has triggered the people to once again go back to their roots and revisit their rich tradition, some of which they have discarded along the way. And for this reason, it would be wrong to come to the

conclusion that the Ao-Nagas have come to attain a new identity that denounces the influence of Christianity, western culture and education. But it is evident from the study that they have indeed realised the importance of holding on to their old traditions, at least enough to be assured of their own origin and true identity. The people have realised now that their once proud identity has gradually been reduced to anonymity, which will eventually lead to as Temsula Ao puts it, a “mere brand name” (Ao, *Identity and Global* 7). When Temsula Ao stresses on the necessity of “a re-appraisal of Naga history and identity” (Ao, *On Being* ix), it is to appeal for a recognition of Naga identity and culture.

Regarding this, one may ponder as to why the Nagas feel the necessity to go back to their roots. Why is change received as such a negative influence? Is change not part of the development, because clearly the Nagas have come a long way from being ‘naked’ to being part of the globalised world? The problem to this issue may be traced back to the attitude of the outsiders who first influenced the tribe. The British administrators wanted change through evolution, the missionaries through revolution (Wolpert 1). But in both cases, their attitude was that the Nagas were primitive and their culture needed to be scrapped and replaced. As such, the Nagas were brainwashed with the colonial ideology into thinking that everything about them was backward and primitive and needed to be replaced. Now, with the increase in population of educated people, the people have now realised this mistake of theirs’ and want to relearn their past, with who they were prior to the advent of the foreigners. Peter Barry writes, “If the first step towards a postcolonial perspective is to reclaim one’s own past, then the second is to begin to erode the colonialist ideology by which the past has been devalued” (193).

This discovery and self realization of valuing their rich oral tradition has swept the new generation, and writers such as Temsula Ao have been facilitating the need to identify once again with the old traditions in order to really understand one’s own identity. It is for this reason that she writes, “identities are made, un-made and re-made” (*On Being* 10). Temsula has taken up this drive in the form of reviving the art of storytelling. Storytelling has been an important tool in preserving, receiving and passing on crucial facts of the Naga history and now that the oral storytelling has

been upgraded to a written form, it continues to play an important role in re-defining one's own identity.

The stark situation that affected the people of Nagaland was the violence that followed their political uprising for an independent Nagaland. Insurgency and counter-insurgencies have led to various kinds of violence that permeate every strata of the society. The study shows that violence is a recurrent scenario in the region, and it is the main factor that continued the already escalating disintegration of indigenous culture and the old way of life brought on by the new belief system, education, colonialism and modernisation. When the common man suffered from violence inflicted by the different factions towards one another, the unity and identity of the collective Naga tribe also suffered. The study notes the various kinds of violence that befell the common man, including violence generated by the conflict between the Indian army and the underground, and violence generated by both the army and the underground towards the common man. These violent incidents damaged government and civil infrastructure, dislocated villages and led to several broken families. The main cause for the outbreak of violence was, as mentioned in chapter three, the struggle for power. The desire for power is an important factor that often triggers violence between two parties. Although Foucault and Hanna Arendt are of the opinion that power does not necessarily lead to violence, however in the case of Nagaland, the fight for secession by the Nagas from the Indian nation, and the clash of power politics between the different factions of the underground army resulted in an unleashing of violence and resistance.

The works of Temsula Ao display the complex relationship between power, resistance and violence. The collection of short stories *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) is a hallmark of the description of terror and violence. Her works depict violence at various levels and degree, from murder cases, village groupings, burnt villages, rapes, and domestic violence. Her stories highlight the violent power and might of the Indian army that triggered resistance among the Nagas, the outcome of which resulted in untold trauma and suffering. In a whirlpool of violence during the turbulent times, the main victims were the common people. As

a result, the people were burdened with terror which played havoc with their pride and dignity as a united collective community.

In the light of ‘benevolent subordination,’ a term used by Temsula Ao (Ao, *On Being* 44-53), the subordination of the common people may be studied under various power factors. Although the common people were threatened and terrorized in various ways, sometimes their subordination to the Indian army as well as the underground army also benefits their survival. For instance, when the Indian army become too harsh towards the people, the underground army would plan counter measures for the protection of the villagers from the harsh army authorities. Similarly, the situation was also often reversed. The underground would demand taxes or donations which the common people cannot meet, and in such situations, the people remained safe thanks to the curfew imposed by the Indian army. Since poverty was a tragic reality during the turbulent times, working under the Indian army to go on errands, or to be a spy, informer etc. was also another means to survive poverty. Although the Nagas considered such people to be betrayers of the tribe and the land, their circumstance due to poverty often compelled the villages to work for the Indian army. In examining this scenario, one can see the gradual moral disintegration caused by violence. Violence indeed begets violence, and in a situation where survival is the chief concern, moral degeneration sets in.

The subordination of women in the society has had its own experience of benevolence too. All women are subordinated to men in almost all the important decision-making institutions in the Naga society. The study has identified two prominent reasons for women accepting this subordination i.e. for physical and economic security. The study also traces the status of the Ao-Naga women under patriarchal authority wherein the dominant ideology of male hegemony dictates specific roles to be played out by the women.

The earlier chapters had shown the ways in which women in the Ao-Naga society enjoyed a fair amount of equality as compared to other women belonging to other regions of the country. Isabel Yrogoyei mentions that all women “are not equally oppressed” (Hooks 59) and therefore, when we say the Ao-Naga women

enjoy a fair amount of freedom, it does not mean they do not experience oppression. Since Naga society is patriarchal, the Ao-Naga women have to cope with patriarchy manifested in different ways within their social structure. Women as already mentioned, are not allowed to take part in important decision makings within the society as well as within the family. This is an important aspect of women oppression in the Naga society. Moreover, in times of conflict, women bear the brunt and suffer immensely as they are the silent victims of violence and as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of the underground while still having to fulfil their responsibilities on the home front. Yet, L. Atola Chankiri points out in her book *Socio-Cultural and Political History of the Nagas* (2015) that the Ao women are in some way better off in comparison to women of other Naga tribes (122).

The study shows that the society has high expectations from women in the roles assigned to her yet expecting her to suppress and deprioritizes her own inner aspirations. It should be noted that these roles are not voluntary acts but impositions made upon the women by a society that is man-centric, and has been a way of life culturally constructed since the old days. Women over the years have been deprived of any kind of social status unlike the men. Since the olden times, the identity of a woman cannot be described without the mention of their male relatives, for instance, her father, husband or brothers. Women dependency on the men can be traced to the division of labour in the olden times wherein the women remained in the household and the men foraged for the family's need in the forest. However, the passage of time has not elevated the status of women, and their role has remained housebound. Since the olden days, women were neither honoured nor mentioned in their folksongs by name, but were only praised in the name of their father or their husband. Any lapse on the part of a woman would label her as irresponsible even today.

Women participation in the political administration and religious institutions remain subordinated to men till today. The study shows how women are still grounded by the tradition and customary laws. Even though many women gladly accept the secondary role thrust upon them, and gladly enjoy the benevolence meted out by the men, a number of educated and working women today have evolved, and thus the question on their lifestyles outside of their home needs to be re-

defined. It is a fact that women and men hold biological differences, but it is also evident from the study that this has led to a degree of divergence in gender roles in the society. Patriarchy, especially in contemporary times, has limited a woman's capacity from reaching its full potential. Moreover, this gender biased ideology cultivates a sense of exclusion among women and this result in a feeling of exclusion and the failure to justify one's own identity. Hence, with the exclusion from the administrative, political and religious platforms, the woman cannot outgrow her subordination to men. In the present scenario, the 33% reservation for women has been opposed strongly by Naga tribal groups who opposed on the grounds that this reservation is against the age-old Naga customary laws. It is striking to note that the opposition is not only from the men, but also surprisingly from women themselves. Since the Naga customary laws are protected under Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution, majority of the people are of the opinion that women should not take part in the political framework of the land. This has ultimately results in the passive role of the women in the political platform. This pattern has continued in the religious institutions as well where Pastors and members of the Deacon Boards are all male, and women can only aspire to the level of Associate Pastor.

In terms of property, since many women have now become the bread earner of the family, it would only be fair that women would be the owner or co-owner of what she has helped to create or finance. The study highlights how material possessions can structure the mental aspects of oppression by reading it in the light of Marxism. Since, the Ao women is deprived of material possessions, materialistically she has no value in the society. Thus, a Marxist approach to this status of women with zero possession reduces their status to the bottom of the economic production. Being at the base of the economic production, a woman cannot control the 'mental production' of the society nor can she break away from her subordination to men.

On the other hand, it is also seen that the role of women and men within a family supplement one another, especially in terms of material relations because it brings stability within the family institution. In *Aosenla's Story*, Aosenla was even made to quit her job after marriage. Likewise, in the Naga society boys are supported

and encouraged to achieve a high education while girls are restricted to a certain level of education and not beyond. The gap between the degree of education in the male and female child widens the gap in their status. At the completion of his education the male child emerges as an agent of exploitation, and at times, of repression, but a female child cannot be the same, since her education is already limited to being educated enough to read the Bible. Seen this light, the educational system is responsible and complicit in the continuance of patriarchy. This unequal opportunity further prevents a woman from claiming her own personal rights as most Naga mothers and grandmothers remain illiterate and unaware of their rights to resist gender injustice. The Naga woman today thus still occupies the secondary sector of the labour market since her skill and education remain secondary to that of the men. It is for this reason that Wolpe writes, “the education system is too closely linked with the division of labour in society, as are ideologies which legitimate this structure” (Wolpe 18).

In the course of this study, the identity of the Ao-Naga women has often been compared with nature. The use of metaphors drawn from nature such as forest, trees, rivers, mountains and animals provides significant backdrop in comparing the status of the women. The exploitation and degradation of the natural world may be viewed in the light of ecofeminism as being parallel to the subordination and oppression of women in the society. As such, the poems of Temsula Ao hold a constant reference to nature especially the mountains. The reference to the mountains may be read as Temsula Ao’s reference to womanhood, and the root of her tribe. The stories of Temsual Ao offer an expression of human life living dual relationships, one in the societal relation and the other in relation to nature. This reference also holds true for Lentina in the story “Laburnam for my Head” where she ignored the grave already laid for her beside her husband’s grave to arranging her own gravesite adorned with a laburnum tree. This act may be viewed as a metaphor of a Naga woman rejecting the patriarchal authority.

The findings of this thesis concluded that the Ao-Naga identity has a fixed root in its rich oral tradition. Its origin is rested upon the origin of the stone people

from Lungterok. The Ao-Naga resided in Nagaland mainly in Mokokchung district and parts of Assam. The Ao villages share similar characteristics in terms of their culture, tradition and customs. Folktales, lores and storytelling play an important tool in preserving the oral tradition. The Ao-Naga identity has undergone various transitions in term of their customs, culture and tradition. The study locates colonial rule, Christianity, education, westernization, modernity and globalization as the key factors of transition. These transitions brought about changes in the Ao-Naga identity as they gradually discarded their old traditions and adopted new lifestyles. The exercise of foreign power upon the Nagas initially by the British rulers and then the Indian Government brought about a societal and cultural disintegration that triggered a nationalist movement among the people. This fight for power and insurgent activities enveloped the land with terror and violence. In the course of such terror and violence, the Ao-Naga identity was almost reduced to anonymity where the people suffered from exploitation and deprivation in various walks of life. The political unrest since the 1950s left a scarring impact on the lives of the people wherein the people lost an integral part of their ancestral identity. At the same time, this also triggered the need to revive their old traditions among the tribe in order to situate their own Naga identity amidst the cultural transition and political unrest. Temsula Ao mentions a saying which was common among the Aos: “Have you sprung out of sticks and stones?” (*On Being* 44) which is actually a form of admonition reminding oneself to remember who they are and where they come from.

The thesis also delves into the status of the Ao-Naga women under patriarchal authority wherein the culture exercises a dominant ideology which dictates specific roles to be played out by the women. The findings conclude that institutions such as family, schools and government organizations are still firmly in favour of male privileges, and that patriarchy as well as the Naga customary laws still bars the women from actively participating in the administrative, political and religious set up of the society. Dissociating the ideological values, or re-division of labour, and amending the customary laws are the important ways in the re-defining of the status of the Ao-Naga woman. Unfortunately, this still appears to be a far cry,

and if this be the case, the society will continue to face lopsided gender inequality which will continue to affect the Ao-Naga identity as a whole.

Temsula Ao has made great efforts to portray the Ao-Naga society and the Naga society in general, through her poems, short stories, fiction, non-fiction essays to revive interest and awareness of one's root and history for the new generations. The study of her works validates the origin myths, helps to portray a realistic picture of the Naga society and its administration, and of how the society has undergone transition throughout its history. Her works provide accurate geographical locations, chronicling important milestones in the Naga history and capturing vivid images of Nagaland through the turbulent years. Moreover, the writings of Temsula Ao is among the few inputs of Naga history in literature. Naga history, culture and traditions have often encountered misinterpretation, hence the study of an insider like Temsula Ao on the same core parameters authenticates the efforts of this thesis. Through her writings, Temsula Ao tries to change the perspective of some writers and scholars from beyond its borders by rooting herself in the past history and old oral traditions of the Naga society. The detailed explanations in her non-fiction on Ao-Naga and Naga oral traditions become an important source in the interpretation of the Ao-Naga identity.

To conclude this chapter, this research concludes that the Ao-Naga identity is a hybrid of the old and the new wherein the old is based on the Naga oral traditions and the new based on external influences. Re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity does not denote a fixed definition of what the Ao-Naga identity is as the Ao-Naga society continues to transit along the changes brought on by modernity, westernization and globalization. The Ao-Naga identity is therefore a synthesis of the old and new, an identity re-structured from a nebulous past as reflected in Ao's poem, 'Stone-people from Lungterok.' The study also concludes that the Ao-Naga people have adopted a deep rooted anchor in Christianity, at the same time, they have also developed the need to revive and learn to value their old traditions. Re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity through the works of Temsula Ao has shown that the Ao-Nagas have indeed arrived at a stage wherein they find themselves ready to re-examine, introspect and

re-imagine the various stages that their identity as a Naga tribal community had undergone, while being aware of the fact that such re-evaluation and re-imagining can be subjected to further change.

The findings of this work generate and provide further research in the area of literary and cultural discourse of not only the Ao-Nagas but of the many other lesser known but equally rich story-telling cultures of other tribes of the region. This research has also opened up the rich potential present in further research on the writings from the region, both fictional and non-fictional, so as to examine whether such works had begun to develop a theoretical and literary discourse that helps to further expand and enrich existing literary studies on the whole.

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HSSLC	MBSE	2005	II	57.6 %
B.A	MZU	2008	II	55.5 %
M.A	MZU	2010	II	57.5 %
M. PHIL	MZU	2012	A	62.4 %

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Other Relevant Information

1) Conferences/Seminars attended:

- i) Presented a paper titled, “Exploring Mizo Ideology in the select songs of L. Biakliana” at the Two Day International Seminar Commemorating the Birth Centenary of L. Biakliana, the First Mizo Novelist organized by the Department of Mizo, Mizoram University in collaboration with Govt. Saitual College, Mizo Academy of Letters, Saitual Literature Club and Art & Culture Dept., Govt. of Mizoram at Govt. Saitual College on 18th & 19th October 2018, Saitual, Mizoram.
- ii) Presented a paper titled, “Exploring Culture in the Narrative of Malsawmi Jacob’s *Zorami* ” at the National Seminar on Discourse on Identity: Community, Culture and Politics organized by St Xavier’s College, Lengpui on 4th & 5th July 2019, Lengpui, Mizoram.

2) Published work:

- i) “The Calling” published in Journal of MIELS Vol. 1. No. 2, October 2015, Pages: 251 - 253. ISSN: 2348-8611.
- ii) “Inside a Womb” and “Stories” published in Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies Vol. III. Issue I, June 2016, Pages: 179 - 180. ISSN: 2348-1188.
- iii) “Repression of Sexuality in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the only Fruit* ” published in Journal of MIELS Vol. 5, December 2018, Pages: 581 - 591. ISSN: 2348-8611.
- iv) “Dominant Ideologies in the Mizo Society as reflected in C. Thuamluaia’s “Sialton Official” ” published in Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies Vol. VI. Issue II, December 2019, Pages: 215 - 225. ISSN: 2348-1188.

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ABSTRACT

**RE-IMAGINING THE AO-NAGA IDENTITY IN THE WORKS
OF TEMSULA AO**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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The Ao-Naga tribe, on which the study of this thesis is conducted, is one of the major tribes of Nagaland. The identity of the tribe is reflected through their customs, beliefs, skills, language, ritual, architecture of homes, music, dance and handicrafts which was handed down through generations in the form of oral tradition and material culture. The core belief of their origin in Ao folklore is one that maintains the belief that the ancestors of the Aos emerged out of the earth at ‘Lungterok’, which means six stones. TemsulaAo writes in her poem, “Stone-People from Lungterok” from her collection of poems *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013),

LUNGTEROK

The six Stones
 Where the progenitors
 And forebears
 Of the stone-people
 Were Born
 Out of the womb
 Of the earth.

...

STONE-PEOPLE

Savage and sage
 Who sprang out of LUNGTEROK (109).

The Ao-Nagas have a rich cultural heritage wherein the oral tradition plays an all-important role in defining good citizenship and maintenance of a harmonious social fabric. TemsulaAo states that, “Oral Tradition of the people became the guiding force to remind, re-energise and re-enforce the people’s sense of themselves through succeeding generation” (Ao, *On Being* 3).

Traditional society of the Aos has always been democratic in its structure. Each Ao village is independent within its jurisdiction and is governed by a ruling body called *Putu Menden*. In order to ensure that knowledge was passed on accurately, the Nagas established the *Morung*, a male dormitory. In the Naga society,

different tribes have different names for the *Morung*, the Aos called it *Arju*. The Aos also had an informal institution for girls called *Tsuki* (Zuki).

The Ao-Nagas have specific customary laws and practices which restricts women to participate in any decision-making bodies or in any village administration, owning landed property, or participating in religious rites and sacrifices. Before the advent of Christianity, the Aos believed and worshipped different gods. However, the practice of animism was gradually discarded by the missionaries as pagan practices or pagan products including songs, myths, folktales and lores. The modern Ao culture gradually grew to become a blend of the old Ao animism and the new Christian religion. The advent of Christianity also brought education and modernisation which eventually developed into reading and printing culture that brought about their passage from orality to literacy. It is evident in the case of the Ao-Nagas that although education and Christianity may have many benefits, it also created a gap between the new and the old.

From what we can glean from the above, it is obvious that the Ao-Nagas had a well-structured framework for their beliefs, rituals and traditions. This is often the case for communities or groups in order to maintain established status and hegemonies. The well-structured framework has given them an identity, an identity which is fuelled with patriotic sentiment because it is a self-created identity which can all be traced back to the founding myth of the Lungterok.

In order to provide a theoretical framework for subsequent discussion on the core issue of identity in this thesis, the semantic meaning and interpretations of the word 'identity' has been drawn from works such as Erik Erikson's *Identity: Youth and Crisis*(1968), Charles Taylor's *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), Richard Jenkins *Social Identity*(2008) and Peter Katzenstein *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (1996). The formation of identity is also studied in the light of ideas formulated by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, Cornel West, Charles Taylor, Frantz Fanon Allison Wier, Gary Herrigel, Francis M. Deng, Michel Foucault, Jonathan Rutherford and Stuart Hall among others.

A post-colonial perspective on identity is drawn from Homi Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity' in *The Location of Culture* (1994), B.B. Kumar's *Naga Identity* (2005) and Pramod K. Nayar's *An Introduction to Cultural Studies* (2008) and *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (2008). As Pramod K. Nayar puts it, "Identity is the consequence of representation and the effect of discourse" (26). The logic of identity is grounded in the understanding of oneself in relation to the elements of continuity provided by other structures or discourses. Hence, this makes identity a narrative of the self, constituted in part by representation within discourse. The notion of 'home' as intrinsic to the formation of one's identity has been analysed through Jonathan Rutherford in his article "A Place called Home" and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. The relation of ideology and identity formation is also studied through *The German Ideology* (1845) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (2015) by Nicholas Abercrombie et al. and Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

The notion of 'identity' offers a complex meaning and its study has opened up a wide range of debatable topics and discourse in literature, politics or social studies. Nevertheless, these definitions refer to a common underlying concept which evokes a sense of recognition, one's feelings about one's self, character, goals and origins. Therefore in order to create or re-create a new perspective of what their identity has become, rediscovering the production of identity is necessary in the postcolonial context.

The study of the thesis is based on the Ao-Naga tribe, which is one of the major tribes of Nagaland. However, since the study involves the history, social conditions and political events that encompass the collective Naga tribe, the study oftentimes refers to the term Naga interchangeably with Ao-Naga in the conduct of its study in the thesis.

The tribes residing in Nagaland and within its surrounding area are known as Nagas. The word Naga originated as an exonym. It was only after the advent of British colonialism that the term came to be adopted as a homogeneous Naga identity. Nagaland has witnessed cultural and traditional transition moulded by

religion, education, socio-political and economic transitions. In the course of time, Nagaland became the hotbed for underground activities and was regarded as a politically disturbed area. However, the problem for its underground movement for secession from India since the 1950s still remains unresolved till today, with the problem compounded by internal factionalism since the 1980s.

Hall has written that cultural identity “has its histories - and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us... It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall 226). This shows that identity is neither fixed in the past nor has come to a fixed position, rather it undergoes constant transformation. The study on identity seeks to re-examine, introspect and re-imagine the various stages of construction of identities, so that readers may distinguish the style in which they are imagined into existence. TemsulaAo writes that “Identities are made, un-made and re-made” (Ao, *On Being* 10). Hence, this study looks at what creates the old and new Ao-Naga identity, and what are the factors that have contributed to this process of transition or synthesis if any. Has their identity changed with their departure from their old traditions or is it built on the old? In order to address such a question, there arises a need to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity.

The study of this thesis on re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity is based on both fiction and non-fiction works of TemsulaAo. They are:

1. *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* (1999)
2. *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006)
3. *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009)
4. *Books of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007* (2013)
5. *Once Upon a Life: A Memoir* (2013)
6. *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014)
7. *Aosenla's Story* (2017) novel

Out of the many Naga writers, the works of TemsulaAo have been selected because her works have close affinity to the oral tradition and Ao-Naga culture and

also captures the transition of Nagaland as it undergoes various changes in the course of its history. The literary devices and narrative strategies employed by TemsulaAo provide a vast area for study in the literary discourse emerging from the Northeast region of India. Her narrative techniques provide deeper insight for the reader and help the reader in imagining or visualizing situations that pertain to Nagaland and on being a Naga, linking the two worlds of the past and present.

A prominent feature in her style of narration both in the creative and non-fictional, is storytelling, which in fact is an important element of the rich oral tradition that her people uphold. She often employs literary tools and devices such as metaphor, imagery, symbolism, humour, irony, pathetic fallacy, subversion, story within a story, rhetorical questions and ecofeminist approach. A unique trait in her creative works also lies in its location i.e. Nagaland. The mythical portrayals and rich folklore in her narratives also serve as a means to recover or reconstruct her community's mythology and tradition.

TemsulaAo deals on recurring themes such as lamentation for the loss of their indigenous culture, traditions, beliefs and history, the appeal for identity and cultural recognition, those relating to women's identity in the context of patriarchy and the theme of violence and power struggles. In this light, TemsulaAo may also be seen as a facilitator of the new generation in helping to re-imagine and realize the value of their rich oral tradition through her works. Presenting her readers with the spirit of nationalism and identity also marks one of the prominent narrative strategies which she incorporates into her writings.

Chapter 1 "Introduction" highlights the history of Nagaland with special reference to the tradition and culture of the Ao-Naga tribe. The chapter also lays out conceptualized notion of identity to set a theoretical framework on the core issue of identity formation of the Ao-Nagas. The chapter introduces TemsulaAo (b.1945) as a poet, story writer and ethnographer situating her among writers of the Northeast of India. It also highlights the literary features and narrative strategies in her works.

Like many of her predecessors, TemsulaAo delves into the different aspects of the Ao-Naga tradition and culture and has successfully described the experiences of her people through discourse. She talks about disposition, cultural fragmentation, post-colonial corruption and the artificially constructed identity imposed upon them by other foreign entities. There is also a strong attempt to preserve the Ao-Naga identity and return to the Naga roots.

TemsulaAo shares the objective to uphold one's own identity amidst colonization, forced or voluntary dislocation, violence and modernization. This makes identity issues more questionable not only for the Nagas but also for other communities of the Northeast as well, which all the more affirms as to why cultural revival is necessary in the region amidst transition. These transitions became a parallel force which often clashed with the age-old authority of the body-politic of the society. Thus, the people lost an integral part of their old identity.

From this perspective, the thesis attempts to re-imagine the Ao-Naga identity in the works of TemsulaAo. Re-imagining here would mean "reinterpreting imaginatively" or "to imagine again or anew; especially to form a new conception of" or "to re-create" (Merriam-Webster). The title of the thesis 'Re-imagining the Ao-Naga Identity' does not necessarily denote an existence of a fixed Ao-Naga identity but rather denotes an identity re-structured from a nebulous past as reflected in TemsulaAo's poem, "Stone-people from Lungterok."

Chapter 2 "Transition and Cultural Disintegration among the Ao-Naga Tribe" focuses on the transition of culture and tradition that has taken place among the Ao-Naga tribe. It studies the intersections of culture, tradition and modernity from the parameters of religion, education and socio-political and economic transitions, and how these have helped shape the Ao-Naga identity.

Richard Jenkins in his book *Social Identity* (2008) writes, "Change, or its prospect, is particularly likely to provoke concerns about identity" (26), hence to take up the study of transition of any culture, the approach challenges the constraints of nationality, race, gender or other group identities at any given time. The cause of

transition among the Ao-Naga tribe in this chapter is briefly identified as the colonization, Christianity, western education and the Indian Independence which generated conflict within the Naga nation. The internal factionalism in politics, the wave of modernity and globalization also contributes to the process of change.

The process of change and cultural disintegration studied in this chapter becomes a crucial factor in re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity as it traces the shift from the old Naga way of life to the modern times where the people have to adapt to different life situations. The adaptation to such situations drive the Ao-Nagas further away from their own roots, as such their culture is exposed to a new construct consisting of a hybrid of two divergent cultures. This newly constructed identity may be identified as similar to HomiBhabha's concept on identity as the 'in-between' space between two different cultures which consists of the mixture of both the cultures.

The process of transition is further hastened by the onset of the nationalist movement amongst the Nagas since the withdrawal of the British from India after India's Independence in 1947. The "straitjacketing dogma" (*Eagleton 4*) did not work for the collective whole, and as a result, led to a cultural awakening. What follows these historical events was the uprising revolution of the Naga nationalist movement. Furthermore, the transition from the collective Naga underground group into different rival factional groups may be seen as creating more tensions in the Naga society that led to disintegrating the mutual trust of families, neighbours, and the whole community.

Although transitions do have their benefits, in most of the cases, the negative aspects of the effects of transition often outweigh the positive. TilottamaMisra remarks that, "clash of cultures has often led to the loss of traditional forms and the adoption of new cultural icons that threatened the existing ones" (Misra xi). Likewise, TemsulaAo also shares the same viewpoint because she sees that the cultural disintegration caused by transition manifests a threat to the existing Ao-Naga identity. The construction of the Ao-Naga identity today as seen from the perspective of TemsulaAo in her works seems superficial and peripheral. She writes, "For a

Naga, identity is many-layered concept” (Ao, *Identity* 6). According to her, the multifarious concept on the Ao-Naga identity may be settled if the new generation would go back to the base of their traditional Naga way of life. When TemsulaAo stresses on the necessity of “a re-appraisal of Naga history and identity” (Ao, *On Being* ix), it is to appeal for a recognition of Naga identity and culture.

Chapter 3 “Violence and ‘Benevolent Subordination’ ” analyses the political conflict and violence that besieged Nagaland since the 1950s, which resulted in exploitation and deprivation that led to despairing subordination on the part of the tribal community. The political unrest was triggered by the shift of power from the colonial rule to the Indian administration since its independence in 1947. The denial for a sovereign Naga nation on the part of the Indian administration stirred up the nationalist movement among the Nagas which resulted in extreme violence and a reign of terror.

The collection of short stories of TemsulaAo, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) and *Laburnum for my Head: Stories* (2009) capture the rampant violence and terror that sweeps the region. Although the short stories by TemsulaAo are partly fictional and may not be interpreted as actual historical records, it reflects the history of Naga people bringing out issues on how the political conflict has caused tragedy, trauma and upheavals in the society. In this way, TemsulaAo is seen as a chronicler of history, taking no sides while dealing with insurgency or underground movement, but seeks to present a picture in the backdrop of socio-economic factors.

Factionalism among the underground brought about more violence and terror among the people. TemsulaAo explains that there was “factional tensions within the various groups due to ideological differences” (Ao, *Laburnam* 92). When the common man suffered from violence inflicted by the different factions towards one another, the unity and identity of the collective Naga tribe also suffered.

The existence of violence is studied as a result of power struggle is viewed according to Michel Foucault who writes, “Power is everywhere; not because it

embraces everything, but it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 93) and that “where there is power, there is resistance” (95). This power resistance often resulted in violence. In almost all situations of violence, the subordinates become direct victims and sufferers to violence. However, the subordination of these victims does not always involve violence to its extremity, but it also entails a striking benevolence from the part of the oppressor or dominant power.

‘Benevolent Subordination’ is the title of one of the articles from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014), where TemsulaAo says that women in Naga society are still regarded as being subordinated to men in almost all the important decision-making institutions in society, and yet this subordination comes with benevolence from the part of the superior male gender. The study has identified two prominent reasons for women accepting this subordination i.e. for physical and economic security. TemsulaAo’s idea of benevolent subordination also opens a new light to re-interpreting the subordinate role of the Naga people towards the colonial rulers and also their subordination to the Indian administration as well. Their subordination is also studied in the light of Louis Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus.

The underlying conscious attitude of being colonised and the trauma experienced through the political upheavals still exist among the Nagas placing them in the periphery of the power structure. The insights carried on by TemsulaAo generate a spirit of patriotism and conscious attitude among the Nagas in positioning their cultural identity within the narratives of their past. The process of rediscovery of the Naga self would require a different perspective, not from the inferior mindset inculcated by the oppressors, but from the all-inclusive perspective which is comprehensively cross-disciplinary in its approach. She suggests that the oral tradition should be the guiding force “to remind, re-energize and re-enforce the people’s sense of themselves through succeeding generation” (Ao, *On Being* 3).

Chapter 4: “Ao-Naga Women under Patriarchy and Dominant Ideology” studies how women have often been silent sufferers yet upholders of the tradition and traditional values of the family and society, oppressed by patriarchal authority that favours male chauvinism wherein the culture exercises a dominant

ideology which dictates specific roles to be played out by the women. Although women in the Ao-Naga society enjoy a fair amount of freedom compared to other societies of other regions in India, it still has its share of oppression and exploitation. As Isabel Yrogoyei puts it, all women “are not equally oppressed” (qtd. in Hooks 59). The first and foremost grounding which deprived the Ao women of their equality with men is the Ao customary laws and practices.

In the essay “Articulate and Inarticulate Exclusion” from *On Being a Naga: Essays* (2014), TemsulaAo brings to light how the Ao customary law disqualifies the Ao women in the village administration, religious rites and entitlement of honour. The Ao woman cannot inherit nor own any landed property (95). Since the Ao woman is deprived of material possessions, materialistically she has no value in the society. Thus, a Marxist approach to this status of women with zero possession reduces their status to the bottom of the economic production. Thus, the disqualification of women solely based on gender reveals how the Ao customary laws encouraged and reinforced patriarchal power over women.

The exploitation of women in the works of TemsulaAo varies from emotional to physical abuse, ranging from themes of loneliness, sadness, fear and pain. The exploitation and degradation of the natural world is often viewed in the light of ecofeminism as being parallel to the subordination and oppression of women in the society. Her books *Once Upon a Life: A Memoir* (2013) and *Aosenla's Story* (2017) highlight the societal attitude towards a girl child which remains inferior, tangling between the patriarchal dominance and societal expectations.

As much as oppression and violation committed towards women are prominent in TemsulaAo's works, she also dwells on the strength of the Naga women by portraying capable, bold, wise and witty women characters in her stories and Ao folklores. However, in reality the image of the Ao woman still continues to be projected as a weaker sex under the patriarchal system.

For the Ao-Nagas, on matters of re-imagining and reasserting their identity as a tribe, the identity and status of the women within their own tribe holds an important

key in determining the status of the holistic identity of the tribe. Even today, institutions such as family, schools and government organizations are still firmly in favour of male privileges, and that patriarchy as well as the Naga customary laws still bars the women from actively participating in the administrative, political and religious set up of the society. The role of the women in the political platform is not only devoid of an elected women representative, but is rather passive and aloof.

Dissociating the ideological values, or re-division of labour, and amending the customary laws are the important ways in the re-defining of the status of the Ao-Naga woman. Unfortunately, this still appears to be a far cry, and if this be the case, the society will continue to face lopsided gender inequality which will continue to affect the Ao-Naga identity as a whole. Although one cannot expect sudden and drastic changes, it does not mean that defying patriarchal dominance, breaking gender-stereotypical roles, restructuring ideological constructs and inclusion of women in the political and administrative parameters are unattainable.

Chapter 5 “Conclusion” concludes that the Ao-Naga identity has a fixed root in its rich oral tradition resting upon the origin of the stone people from Lungterok. The works of Temsula Ao validates the origin myths, helps to portray a realistic picture of the Naga society and its administration, and of how the society has undergone transition throughout its history. The study locates colonial rule, Christianity, education, westernization, modernity and globalization as the key factors of transition. The Indian Independence which generated conflict within the Naga nation and the internal factionalism in politics also contribute to the process of change. These transitions brought about changes in the Ao-Naga identity as they gradually discarded their old traditions and adopted new lifestyles.

This thesis concludes that the Ao-Naga identity is a hybrid of the old and the new wherein the old is based on the Naga oral traditions and the new based on external influences. Re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity does not denote a fixed definition of what the Ao-Naga identity is as the Ao-Naga society continues to transit along the changes brought on by modernity, westernization and globalization. The Ao-Naga identity is therefore a synthesis of the old and new, an identity re-structured

from a nebulous past as reflected in TemsulaAo's poem, "Stone-people from Lungterok." The study also concludes that the Ao-Naga people have adopted a deep rooted anchor in Christianity, at the same time, they have also developed the need to revive and learn to value their old traditions. Re-imagining the Ao-Naga identity through the works of TemsulaAo has shown that the Ao-Nagas have indeed arrived at a stage wherein they find themselves ready to re-examine, introspect and re-imagine the various stages that their identity as a Naga tribal community had undergone, while being aware of the fact that such re-evaluation and re-imagining can be subjected to further change.

The findings of this work generate and provide further research in the area of literary and cultural discourse of not only the Ao-Nagas but of the many other lesser known but equally rich story-telling cultures of other tribes of the region. This research has also opened up the rich potential present in further research on the writings from the region, both fictional and non-fictional, so as to examine whether such works have begun to develop a theoretical and literary discourse that helps to further expand and enrich existing literary studies on the whole.

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