

Research article

The Folklore of Flowers: Significance of Floral Culture in Ao-Naga Oral Tradition

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Abstract

In the Ao-Naga community, flowers play a significant role as expressions of beauty and aesthetics while also having their own cultural lives. They also carry indigenous folk wisdom and traditional healing practices passed down through the ages. Each indigenous flower carries its own cultural meaning. They are also used in the practice and perpetuation of cultural codes and values; seen in the way they are captured in the folklore of the tribe. They feature widely in the songs, tales, and other verbal arts such as proverbs and proverbial sayings, as well as in the material culture of the Ao-Nagas, thereby reflecting the intimate bond that the Ao-Nagas have with nature and, in this instance, particularly flowers.

The floral imagery in the Ao-Naga cultural imagination is embedded with motifs and meanings in folktales, traditional attires, and adornments and has several ethical implications, metaphorical significance, and artistic expressions. For the Aos, any plant that bears flowers is categorized as a flower (*naro*) and has indigenous names. *Metsüben Naro* (Rhododendrons), for instance, is a renowned flower for its iconic representations in poetic songs, expressions, and its symbolic embodiment of love in oral narratives like *Jina and Etiben*. The cultural ecology of the Aos is deeply encapsulated in the “sacred lore” such as *Naklu Ken* (floral folk songs); *Walokwatem* (rites and rituals); festivals like *Moatsü* and *Tsüngremmong*; and ceremonies like *Kika-süchi* (feast of merit).

This paper delves into the world of flowers as encapsulated in the Ao-Naga Oral tradition, specifically looking at the role and significance of floral culture through various aspects. Particular emphasis has been given to look at the rhododendron within the context of cultural practices, values, and cultural memory of the lived reality of the Aos as reflected in the lore of the tribe. Most significantly, the paper analyses how Ao Nagas imbue their natural surroundings with meaning.

Keywords:

Naklu Ken,
Metsüben Naro,
indigenous
folk wisdom,
Ao-Nagas,
folklore.

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Introduction

In the Ao language, i.e., *Chungli*, *Mongsen*, and *Changki*, flowers are called *Naro*. According to T. Senka Ao, the word “*Naro*” is a combination of two words where “*Na*” in *Chungli* means “you” and “*ro*” is a *Mongsen* suffix of “*aro*” which means “beautiful”. Hence, morphologically, it is implied as “*Na arojao*,” meaning “you are beautiful,” which symbolically refers to the beauty of a flower (personal interview 21.01.26). It has also different connotations based on its context, which is metaphorical as well as philosophical, reflecting the Ao-Naga worldview of nature and environment. Besides the morphological interpretation, *Naro* also refers to any ornaments that are worn in the ear; it is applied figuratively to children as a pet term by parents; it is also symbolically used by lovers to refer to each other (Clark, 2013, p. 474). Flowers are often compared to a woman due to their universal feminine quality, which is encoded through analogies, proverbial sayings, quotations, idiomatic expressions, etc.

Indigenous terms are also derived from “*Naro*,” like *Tzüki*.¹ which is a suffix of the *Chungli* word *atsüki*² which means “a garden of flowers,” metaphorically referring to flowers to young girls. In Ao culture, maidens are referred to as “*Kongro*,” which literally means “an orchid,” and a young man as “*Sangpang*,” a plant species which bears red flowers and seeds used as an ornament. During pre-Christian times, the Aos had widely engaged in headhunting practices where the “*mangko*”³ were metaphorically referred to as “*anoknaro*,” where “*anok*” is a *Mongsen* word for “dao” or “machete,” symbolizing bravery and honor. Meanwhile, the word “*narokhum*” has similar connotations, which mean “honorific names”.

Significance of Flowers in the Ao-Naga Oral Tradition

According to the Ao Naga oral narratives of the discovery of water by the two brothers *Imsenpirong* and *Sempirong* at *Chungliyimti*, it was the bulbul bird that indicated the water source to them by singing – “*Imsenpirong, Sempirong Longkitzüong, tzümayong*” (*Imsenpirong, Sempirong*, drink water from the cave). Upon searching, they found a red flower called *Tzüpennaro* or *Lojetnaro*⁴ floating near a rocky cave, and that is how they spotted it with the help of this flower (Aier, 2018, p. 93). This story shows how different species in nature co-exist together since time immemorial in the context of Ao-Naga flower culture. A detailed analysis is given in the review of literature.

Another folk narrative from Dr. Purtongzuk Longchar’s book, *Historical Developments of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland* (2002), also illustrates how flowers are used as a symbolic gesture to reveal the personality of a person, especially that of women. According to this oral narrative, a man named *Jangjir* was loved by two maidens named *Melangnaro* from a rich family and *Ponginaro* who was from a poor family. He was in a dilemma about whom to choose as his wife, and hence he decided to test them through various skills but still couldn’t pick one when, at last, his mother put on the final test to choose her daughter-in-law. One fine day, the mother arranged to see the two girls one by one, where she kept the house in a disorderly manner and invited the rich girl to come by. When she approached, she jumped over all the things instead of arranging them in proper places. In Ao Naga culture, a decent (cultured)

¹ A girls’ dormitory where young girls of the same age group and clan used to sleep at the matron’s house to learn social etiquettes, customs, culture and tradition during pre-modern times

² Garden

³ Enemies’ head

⁴ Its common name is coral tree; scientific name is *Erythrina*.

woman is expected to have mastery in all the household chores and possess feminine qualities in order to be recognized as a suitable wife and a good daughter-in-law. When the girl was about to leave, the mother asked her to pluck the hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) and rose flowers from the garden; she plucked a bunch and kept several in the orifices of both ears. In the Ao Naga custom, this was a sign of lecherous women who will never be satisfied with one husband. After some time, the mother invited the poor girl on the pretext of removing grey hair, where she messed up her house as before. The moment the poor girl stepped into the house, she first arranged everything in an orderly manner, and when it was time to leave, the mother asked her to pluck the flowers if she liked. To this, she happily plucked just one flower and kept it in the lobe of her right ear and left. Her actions signify that she could be happy to live with one man (p. 241-243).

The story shows how flowers are embedded in the Ao-Naga culture and customs, defining different spheres and ways of life. One can also surmise how a flower serves as a medium in defining the character and personality of a person. In the context of this story, it is the hibiscus and the rose flower that forewarn the mother and son in choosing a suitable wife between the two women. The symbolic gesture of the two women towards the flowers and the way they adorn them signifies the contradictory character of the two women- one who is presumed to be a lecherous woman and the other to be a worthy one.

A variety of wild endemic flowers are found in the Ao region, which are mostly with medicinal benefits, and in the Ao philosophy there is no such distinction for plants in general or flowers in particular based on taxonomy or botanical terms. However, every plant that is endemic to the Ao region has its own indigenous terms which are named after the plant's characteristics, structure, and cultural symbolism. For instance, rhododendrons are used not only as adornments but also in medicinal cures, as Talimenla Tetseo has mentioned in her book *Ethnomedicine of the Ao Nagas* (2008), "Flowers boiled and the liquid is drunk for checking diarrhea and dysentery" (p. 88). Furthermore, it is also considered a "sacred flower," which is a mythical belief that it was planted by the god *Longlangba* in his garden. Rhododendrons are found in varieties of colors such as white, pink, red, etc., where the species that is found in *Longkhum* is that of vibrant red (as shown in Figure 1).



Fig. 1. *Metsüben Naro* at *Longlangba*, *Longkhum* Village (Photo Courtesy: Toshimongba Mollier)

In the Ao Naga society, religion has always occupied a central place that has influenced the cognitive and volitional aspects of man. As Panger Imchen states, “There is no single Ao village, even after a hundred and sixteen years of Christianity, which has done away with the extraordinary power of the stone fetish. This stone fetish, or *Along Tsüngrem*, is still recognized in every village (p. 55-56). Hence, every Ao Naga village used to have one or the other such boulder/stone as the Supreme Being, and proper ceremonies, rites, and rituals used to be performed to ensure immense blessings as well as protection from the enemies and other epidemics. Imchen did mention the *Longlangba* at *Longkhum* village, a huge rock that acts more dangerously with thunderstorms when insulted or stamped upon (p. 56). For the *Longkhum* villagers, the *Longlangba*, or the stone god, was considered to be the oldest stone god. It is believed to be a powerful god who used to help the villagers in times of warfare and brought fame and honor to the people (Miri & Karilemla, 34).

Flowers have an innate symbolic quality in nature which is deeply rooted in almost all global cultures, bridging the worlds of the human and the divine. Every culture or community has its own symbolic expressions or representations of the flower world, fitting the bill in all circumstances of ceremonies- birth, marriage, death, and celebrations of festivals. In other words, flowers act as a non-verbal language and a connecting element in all ritualistic activities, encapsulating indigeneity and cultural heritage. One such belief among the Aos is illustrated below:

Motsüngba will weigh us on a flower scale. People who weigh less on the scale would die, falling from high cliffs and hills on their way as they went about plucking the flowers. With the belief in us that flowers were important in order to add weight on the scale, we used to put flowers in our ears and keep bunches of flowers at home too. Because

of this belief, we used to grow flowers in our garden and even in the fields. We would wear the flowers in our ears all the time. Without putting flowers in our ears, we would never go to the fields. We considered the flowers as an important part in our life. (Miri & Karilemla, 2015, p. 58-59)

Review of Literature

The Ao Nagas: J.P. Mills (ed. 2018)

The monograph by Mills is a pioneering work on the Ao Nagas, an ethnographic work carried out during the early 1900s, when the region was still part of the Naga Hills. It encompasses the origin and migration, social structure, and domestic life of the Ao Nagas. In his work, he has mentioned some selected indigenous flowers that are endemic to the Ao region and how these plant species carry cultural meaning in the everyday life of the people. The Aos used to grow several species of flowers in their gardens as well as in the fields, which in a way reflects the practice of floral culture since time immemorial and has been passed down through the generations. Some of the flowers as noted in the book are: *yimpang naro* (C)⁵/*otong naro* (M)⁶ (canna); *kimung naro* (C) (stay-at-home flower)/*nokyimmonger naro* (M) (village watchman flower), a red flower that blooms when the sun is well up and those who stay in the village all day can see at its best; *chenchang naro* (C) (millet flower)/ *chemdang naro* (M) (evening flower), a flower which blooms only when the millet is ripe; orchids too are brought from the jungles and tied on trees near the house or grown on the roofs; *chuba naro* (poinsettias) which is believed to have been brought from the plains are to be found in most of the Ao Naga villages; *alu naro* (C)/*alu enchang naro* (M) (coxcomb flower); every morung has a garden of its own, where only the inmates can pluck the flowers for their adornments, a fine red flower known as *mechensanger naro* (C)/*mechen naro* (M) (the flower of men who do not run away), is commonly grown by the boys in the dormitory (Mills, 126-127).

In the Ao Naga culture, flowers hold a special place that manifests not only beauty and aesthetics but also immense cultural significance. Floral culture is very much considered a cultural practice, as specified in the etymology or morphology of the indigenous terms used for each flower. As illustrated above, most of the flowers are named after the seasons, colors, mythical beliefs and stories, appearance and physical structures, etc. Hence, it can be stated that the manifestations of flowers in the Ao-Naga culture are an age-old tradition that has been passed down through the generations.

Ao Naga Worldview: A Dialogue by Sujata Miri and Karilemla (2015)

Karilemla's concept of environment, ecology, and Nature highlights the Ao-Naga philosophy of how culture, tradition, and identity are interwoven with the nature that surrounds them. She presents the worldview of the Ao from an emic perspective that forms the Ao-Naga ecology, narratives, and ontology of deep ecology. In Ao, *meta-ayong* is the word for nature that has life and force, where human beings were certainly not the centre of the universe but act as the abiding force of life (Karilemla, 834-835). She also reiterates that "on the Ao-Naga worldview, without narratives, poetry, place and rituals, any philosophical conceptualization remains soulless" (835), which can be considered as elaborate rituals and norms that define the identity as Ao Nagas and validate the existing culture and tradition. For the Ao Nagas,

⁵ Chungli- the standardized language of the Aos

⁶ Mongsen – a dialect in Ao language

nature constitutes sacred inspirational forces and is a deeply unique characteristic of folk culture. The preservation and conservation of nature is embodied in concern about causing any kind of harm to nature (837-838). Flowers, being part of nature, are considered sacred, have deep cultural significance, and are used in performing rituals and social norms.

The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition: Temsula Ao (2012)

Ao opines that the Ao-Naga oral tradition has evolved into a comprehensive and integrated network of indigenous knowledge-system, incorporating art with reality, history with imagination and the ideal with the practical that constitutes the world of origin as well as the dynamic continuance within that indigenous world (Ao, 184). She does not view oral tradition as a mere form of ‘story-telling’ but as a source of the people’s literature, social customs, religion, history, etc. In her collection of folktales and mythical stories, she did mention the discovery of water by the two *Jamir* brothers at *Chungliiyimti*. As per the story, while the two brothers were on their way to the field, a *tsükpo* bird called out to them, singing *Imsenpirong, Sempirong, Longkitsuyong, Tsumayong* (*Imsenpirong, Sempirong*, have you not seen the water in the cave?). Hearing this, they decided to search for the water, assuming that there must be water nearby. Upon searching, they discovered a clear pool of water inside a cave with some fresh flowers in bloom near the pond, which the Aos call *tsüben naro* (flowers that bloom in water). The two brothers decided to keep this a secret but were soon discovered by the villagers when they noticed that the rice cooked by the two brothers looked whiter, whereas their rice looked reddish, as they used the sap of roots for cooking purposes. The villagers insisted to the two brothers about their secrecy, but they pretended that they were ignorant, upon which the villagers decided to spy on them. When the truth was finally revealed, initially, the villagers were angry but were soundly berated by the elders and began to enjoy the crystal-clear water. A proclamation was made to commemorate the names of the two brothers so that the credit for discovering water could be given to them for posterity. Hence, the names *Sempirong* and *Imsenpirong* and the *Mongsen* equivalent *Tsüongchang* (one who discovered water) are associated with the discovery of water by the Aos. Tradition has also ensured that these names are the exclusive property of the *Jamir* clan and no other clan can claim these names (Ao, 86-87).

Though the main focus here is the discovery of water and the significance of the names of the *Jamir* brothers, i.e., *Imsenpirong* and *Sempirong*, the story also embodies the interrelationship and co-existence of nature with man. For instance, it is the *tsükpo* bird that signaled the two brothers about the water in the cave. Upon locating the source, it is the *tsüben naro* that made the two brothers aware that the water in the pond is potable. This relationship shows how ecology, environment, and nature work in sync, which also, in a way, reminds us that man cannot exist alone and he is not in the superior position over other species on this planet.

Significance of Metsüben Naro as Reflected in the Oral Narratives of Jina and Etiben

The story of *Jina and Etiben* is a 12th-century (approx.) Ao-Naga tragic love story that has gained worldwide recognition due to numerous research works and documentation, resulting in translations in different languages. Today it can be found in various genres like poetry, folktales, love story, theatrical performances, etc. Meanwhile, many regard it as “the Romeo and Juliet” of the Ao Nagas due to their intense, passionate love that they share despite various oppositions leading to their tragic ends. One may find variations and contradictory

versions in the story owing to various factors: firstly, it is an indefinite years-old orally transmitted narrative with variations in retelling; secondly, it has taken place during the “Ken O Putu.”⁷ where the medium of communication was mostly poetical songs and metaphorical expressions; thirdly, it has been retold and rewritten in different contexts. In fact, today the story remains as a cultural legacy and identity of the Ao Naga folklore, which also serves as an intangible cultural heritage of the Ao Nagas.

According to primary sources (*Jina O Etiben Na* by I. Sashimeren Aier and personal interviews with informants from Longkhum, Mopungchuket and Mongchen villages), the relationship that Jina and Etiben shared was unacceptable in the Ao Naga culture, as they were “*melemboyim*”⁸ since Jina happened to be from the Lemtur clan whose parents were Kilangsang and Sowina. Etiben belonged to the Mongsentsünglar (Aichenlar, Longchalar) whose parents were Ozümba and Pongtunaro (Aier, p. 1). This can be further amplified by the following songs that the lovers dedicated to each other during their courtship:

*Lemtu rüjo Jinaka Etiben nati
Ayuzangür melemboi, Yim tera yimya.
Ena lembolasang, lanu asensor lembola.*

English Translation:

*Every Lemtur at the Ariju⁹ talks,
Of the infidel love affair of Jina and Etiben,
If (we) could marry, all the young lovers would.*

This story highlights the social structure of the Aos, where exogamy is strictly adhered to even at present times. Both the lovers, the parents, the inmates at their respective morungs, as well as the entire villagers know about their infidel relationship. In the Ao Naga social structure, a person cannot marry from his/her same clan or phratry, which is considered a taboo. In this regard, the Lemtur (Jina) and the Longchar (Etiben) clans are “*melemboyim*” because of the same phratry. This kind of monogamous marriage system is strictly adhered to even today, and offenders have to face the consequences, even to the extent of death. Hence, the Aos often believe in the saying that “*Iba nüknürar (temerateper) melidaksüba yong tanu tashi nüknürar malir ta otzü agi jembir*” (Aier, p. 8). (Translation: This story often reminds people that destiny does not favor inseparable lovers). Owing to the eternal tragedy of *Jina* and *Etiben*, it is not advisable for the youngsters, especially the “*nüknürar*”¹⁰ not to be victims of such extreme and intense passionate attachment, as it will have a dire impact upon them.

⁷ Here, “ken” means “song”; “O” means “words” and “putu” means “generation”. Literally it refers to the era of poetry and songs.

⁸ The Aos practice exogamy i.e. one cannot marry within the same clan or phratry. It is considered as a taboo to do so and such offenders are excommunicated from the village.

⁹ Dormitory where young boys learn multifarious tasks like war tactics, handicrafts, etc. In bigger villages, each clan has its own dormitories.

¹⁰ Literally, it means lovers who are immersed in each other’s love. It also refers to first love.



Fig. 3. Etiben Tower at MongsenMepu, Mopungchuket Village



Fig. 4. Jinaba Tower at Lemtur Mepu, Mopungchuket Village

The story of *Jina and Etiben* is a prolonged narrative account of the two lovers who had traversed various regions of the Ao areas to find peace and comfort in each other. As per various accounts, they spent months away from home and adventured in Mongchen and Longkhum villages, where their footprints are embedded in the rocks. Many call Longkhum “the abode of the Lovers,” where Jina would play his cup violin, and Etiben would clean her ornaments and listen to the enchanting music.

Unlocking Motifs and Symbolism of Rhododendrons in the Sacred Spaces of Longkhum Village

The scientific name of Rhododendron is *Rhododendron arboreum*, which is also commonly known as “rose tree,” which is of Greek origin: *rhodo* (rose) and *dendron* (tree). It is the State flower and an endemic plant species of Nagaland, where it is found only in the highest peaks in extreme cold conditions like the Dzukou Valley, the Satoi range (Zunheboto district), Pfütsero (Phek district), Pulie Badze (Kohima district), Seyochung area (Kiphire district), Mt. Japfü, and the Himalayas. At present, Longkhum is the only village under Mokokchung district where this rare plant species is found due to its favorable climatic conditions. However, according to some primary sources (an informant from Longsa¹¹ village), this flower was endemic even in her village some decades ago but is extinct now owing to reasons unknown. According to an informant from Longkhum village (male, 89 years), rhododendrons are called “*metsüben naro*,” which appears to be a morphological derivation from Chungli and Mongsen languages where “*metsü*” refers to “seeds” and “*ben*” means “to sow”. Kajen Mongro also writes, “*Tenoktenzü mapang shidak nung iba naro ya aponger anungji ‘Metsüben Naro’ ta ajar*” (1987, p. 72), which can be translated as, “It blooms during seed sowing season and hence is called *Metsüben Naro*”. In the Ao region, *Metsürem*¹² and *Rongchi*¹³ are considered the perfect months for sowing seeds, and the blooming of *Metsüben Naro* symbolically reminds people that it’s time to sow the seeds. The duration of this flower is about one to two months, which is quite long compared to other flowers, and hence it is very symbolic in the Ao cultural worldview, which is reflected in different folklore genres.

Longkhum is one of the significant historical villages in the Ao region for its rich cultural heritage and ancient religious sites like the Longlangba, Mongzü Ki.¹⁴, Rito¹⁵, Longritzü¹⁶ and also the infamous legendary folktale of *Jina and Etiben* associated with this beautiful place. According to primary and secondary sources, Longkhum was known as a “*Nokinketeryim*.”¹⁷ This is recorded even in the famous chronicle of Longkhum’s *Struggle against Nokrang* by Doshy Longkumer (2003), *Pentochepchep Ritsüng* by W. Chubabungba, and many other vernacular historical writings. The 23rd Hornbill Festival Magazine (2022) reads, “Rhododendrons adorn the hillocks and the precipices surrounding it, providing an astounding sight during full bloom in the village of Longkhum” (p. 29). The same magazine

¹¹It is an Ao village in the Langpangkong range under Mokokchung district of Nagaland known for its

¹² March

¹³ April

¹⁴ Eagle’s Nest; it is a mythical belief that the souls of the dead resides here as the Aos had a strong belief that eagles are one of the souls

¹⁵An abandoned place in the Longkhum village

¹⁶Literally, it means “bitter water”;

¹⁷ Warrior’s village

also writes about the *Longlangba* (Stone Bridge) as “Before the coming of Christianity, it is believed that people worshipped spirits here” (p. 29). This Stone Bridge is believed to be the longest natural stone bridge in the Ao area, where the footprints of the tragic love story of *Jina* and *Etiben* (Romeo and Juliet of the Ao Nagas) are still embedded in these rocks. Among all the Ao Naga villages, *Longkhum* is situated at the highest altitude, from where one can view the entire Ao ranges extending even to the *Lotha*.¹⁸ areas and the Assam valleys. Here is a “*Naklu Ken*”¹⁹ on *Metsüben Naro*:

*Longkhüm nunger,
Metsüben sela naro,
Longdang, Rito alivok,
Anentang naro,
Süngku meyungpen naro,
Chang naro.*

English Translation:

*It is our Longkhüm
Metsüben flower,
That blooms among the Longdang at Rito since forefathers’ time,
The Anentang flower, the Chang flower
And all the flowers of dry wood
Are your offsprings.*

This song is a description of the flower which is native to *Longkhüm* (a historical village in Mokokchung district) which blooms abundantly at Rito among the *Longdang*.²⁰ It uses vivid and picturesque imagery to depict the peculiarity and beauty of the flower using its corresponding types of flowers, like the *Anentang* and *Chang* flowers.

Metsüben Naro is also considered a “sacred flower” of the Aos, especially for the *Longkhum* villagers, for its strong resistance to giving out its best shades without fading despite the harsh, dry, windy season. This can be further supplemented by the writings of Kajen Mongro, where he states, “*Kotaker azüngtsü agi mesür*” (1987, p. 72), meaning “It feeds upon the heavenly mist”. As per the primary sources (informants from *Longkhum* village), *Metsüben Naro* is also called “*Kotaker Naro*.”²¹ As it was planted by the *Longlangba* god in his garden (in the present context, this site is known as the “Stone Bridge” as described above. It is a mythical belief that the stones are naturally or mystically piled up, and hence the villagers named the mystical being the *Longlangba* god. This site is famous for the *Metsüben Naro*, as it is believed to have been planted by the god. It serves as a very significant site for the people, as one of the informants (*Longdangsüja Mongro*) narrates in *Ao Naga World-view: A Dialogue* by Sujata Miri and Karilemla (2015, p. 34):

Longlangba stone god is found in *Longkhum* village. This stone is said to be the oldest stone god in this village. It is said this stone god used to help the villagers in times of

¹⁸ One of the major tribes of Nagaland that shares its boundary with the Aos

¹⁹ A folksong that commemorates a person or a thing

²⁰ Larva of a kind of moth

²¹ Heavenly flower

warfare and brought fame and honor to the people. There is a song sung in praise of the Longlangba god.

*Oh! Longkhum kü yimkongi,
Tsüngrem yimkü m mongjen;
Moya tsün sako meya remchen,
Koyimer na tenang shini.*

English Translation:

*Oh Longkhum, my village,
God's abode;
The burial place of my enemies,
No villagers should try to invade us.*

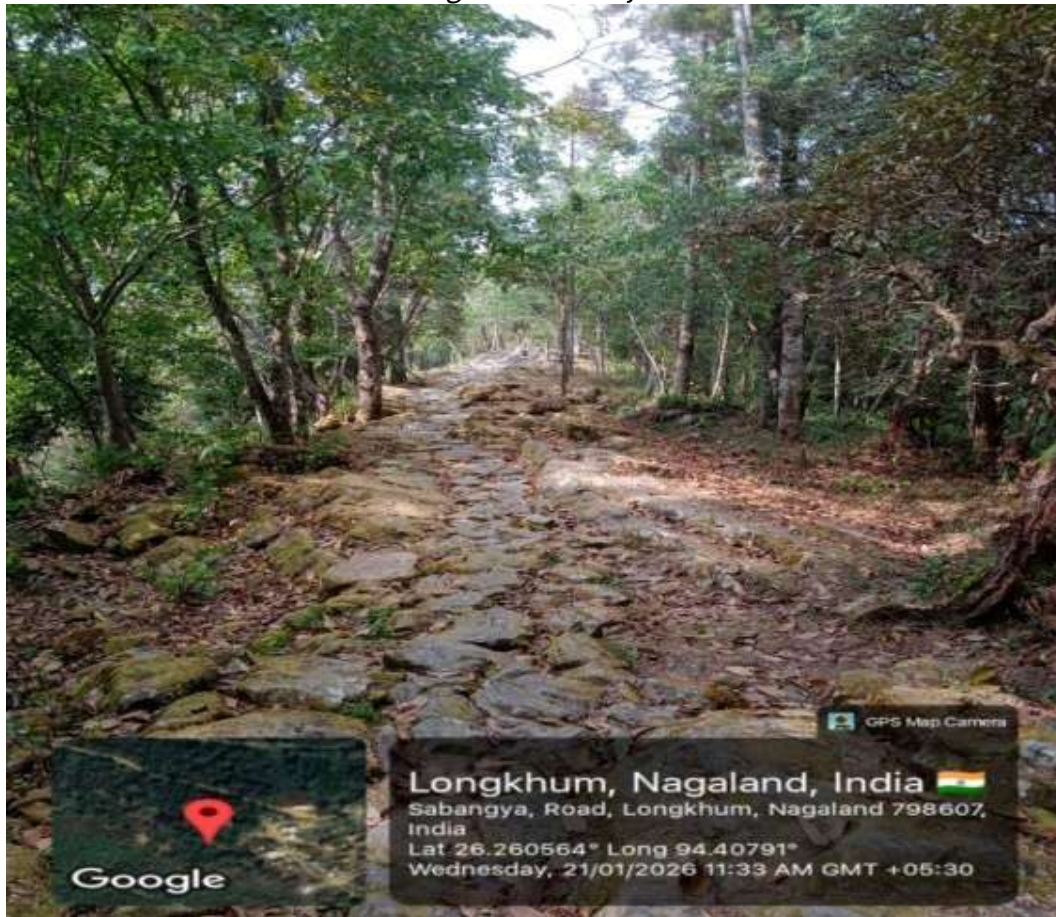


Fig. 2. The Longlangba (Stone Bridge) at Longkhum Village

Conclusion

In the Ao Naga worldview of flowers, the quote reads *Naro ajakbo naro masü* (All flowers are not flowers) is a metaphorical reference to the symbolism and motifs that are embedded in the floral culture of the Aos. For the Ao Nagas, *Naro* carries deep metaphorical and cultural significance which are echoed through oral narratives and traditions. In many cultures, flowers symbolize different expressions and sentiments of passion, affection, beliefs, fear, sadness, etc. Many associate floral symbols with religion, gods, totems, and deities; flowers

are also representations for seasons and months of the year, as viewed by Ernst and Johanna Lehner: “Flowers were the first decorative implement for the earliest attempts of man to adorn himself” (1960, p. 11)

Flowers suffice in every contextual form- it can be a bouquet for expression, admiration, and reverence of love and desire; a garland for feasts, events, and other religious and worldly ceremonies; a décor for accessories and beautification; a wreath for casket and funerary rites; flowers also aid in therapy for mental and physical well-being; some flowers are also used as an edible item and in folk medicine as well.

In the Ao Naga context, flowers serve as carriers of indigenous folk wisdom, symbolizing different expressions and alterations in their own cultural settings. *Naro* is not only used as an adornment, but it also expresses the personality of a person as depicted in the folk narratives. In the Ao Naga oral tradition, most of the floral folk songs exemplify the feelings and emotions between lovers using the metaphors and analogies of flowers. Flowers are used in different manifestations in everyday life, evoking nature’s wellness and vitality of life, considered an important part of life since time immemorial.

List of Interviews:

Sl. No.	Name	Age	Village	Gender	Occupation
1.	T. Alemwati Pongen	88	Longkhum	Male	Farmer
2.	Temjenyapang Pongen	89	Longkhum	Male	Farmer
3.	Alemnungsang Ozukum	83	Mopungchuket	Male	Farmer
4.	Tzükjemwati	75	Mongchen	Male	Deacon
5.	Bendangyanger Imchen	50	Mongchen	Male	Council Chairman
6.	T. Senka Ao	80	Mukuli	Male	Author

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