

**CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE
AMONG THE NAGAS
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

Dissertation submitted to
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Christianity and Social Change among the Nagas: A Sociological Study**” submitted by **A. S. Shimreiwung** in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This work is original.

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

Susan Visvanathan

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(Supervisor)

Anand Kumar

Prof. Anand Kumar
(Chairperson)

For my younger brother

MAHAINGAM

who lives in a better world

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While carrying out this study, I have encountered certain unanticipated problems. At one point of time, I thought it would be difficult to complete this work in the given stipulated time. Therefore, it is a great relief to me that this work is completed on time.

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Introduction

This study is about religious change among the Nagas of Northeast region. The Nagas are a conglomeration of numerous tribes, dwelling on the mountainous range, on the easternmost parts of India. Until the arrival of the British, the Nagas were largely unknown to the outside world. They had been isolated from their closest neighbors as well, which actually gave them enough liberty to maintain a unique social and cultural life. Geographical location might have also contributed to their state of 'isolation' and 'difference'. However, over the years Nagas have undergone varied forms of social change. Significantly, it was the expansion of British Colonialism, and Missionaries interventions that has vitiated the state of isolation and completely change the social life of the Nagas. Specifically, this study seeks to analyze the impact of Christianity on the religious and social life of the Nagas.

The encounter that had taken place between the Nagas and Missionaries was similar to other tribes that have embraced Christianity. Crucial to this Missionaries encounter was the introduction and acceptance of "New Religion" which the Missionaries explicitly proclaimed wherever they ventured out. No two religions are alike, even if certain similarities are found. On this assumption, Naga religion and Christianity – the 'New Religion' – have been construed as distinct and different. Broadly, these two religions can be differentiated as 'Folk religion' and 'Universal religion'.¹ Often, Naga religion has been described as 'animism' and 'primitive religion'. However, the nature of Naga religion has been 'locality-specific'.² Basically, the difference between 'Folk religion' and 'Universal religion' is that: 'Folk religion' is 'bound to a

¹ Louis Schneider, *Sociological Approach to Religion*, John Willy and Sons Inc. New York, 1970, pp. 73-7.

² Richard M. Eaton, *Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas*. Indian Economic and Social History Review, 21.1 1984.

particular people, folk or tribe, just as the particular people, folk or tribe is bound to a particular religion'; whereas, 'Universal religion are detached from a folk base.' 'They address themselves to individuals anywhere and everywhere'.³ Therefore, traditional Naga religion, being bounded to a particular people, tribe and locality, was different from Christianity, which tries to address people anywhere and everywhere. Accepting another and denouncing the other is likely to have massive impact in the way people think, imagine and interact or in the way they live. This study seeks to examine the changes that have been brought to a society due to the acceptance of 'new religion'.

Area of Study

As mentioned, this study is about religion – specifically about religious change and its social implications. Emphasis will be made on comprehending Naga religion, as well as Christianity. The account of traditional Naga religion lies in obscurity, as most of the Nagas themselves have refrained from following it. On the other hand the 'new religion' that Nagas have embraced seems ambiguous. Therefore, a thorough analysis of these two religions seems imperative.

The processes of cultural changes that have taken place among the Nagas have been construed as 'acculturation'. Some scholars have employed this term while referring to cultural changes among the Nagas. However, what does this term – Acculturation – imply, have not been explicitly stated. Here, the term 'acculturation' will be understood as 'those phenomena which results when groups of Individual having different culture come together into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of

³ Louis Schneider, *Sociological Approach to religion*. p. 73.

either or both groups”.⁴ The focus here is on the processes of social changes among the Nagas due to ‘first-hand contact’ with the Foreign Missionaries.

The role of Christian Missionaries is another area that is essential to the understanding of social change among the Nagas. Missionaries have followed varying methods and various strategies while carrying out their work. Their relationship with the Colonialist appears to be ambiguous; they have conived as well as oppose each other. On the other hand, their relationships with, and perspective towards the Nagas have been inconsistent. These were crucial to the religious teachings they imbibed, and lifestyles they brought. Here, the focus will be on the Protestant Missionaries who have come to Naga Hills in the late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century.

The process of social change is one of the focal point of this study. Here, the emphasis is on the ‘abrupt’ change and ‘break-away’ from old social and cultural practices: concerning with the *change of society* rather than *change in society*. Here, it is understood as significant alterations in structural relationships and cultural patterns. Substantively, the phenomena of cultural changes and structural changes have been taken into considerations.

Methodology

It is basically a diachronic enquiry on the changes in the forms of social life. Historical records as well as ethnographic accounts have been analyzed to comprehend the processes of social change that have happened in Naga society. In fact, rich ethnographic accounts about traditional Naga society are abundantly available. Mostly, the colonial officers posted in Naga Hills have

⁴ See *Acculturation*, International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, vol-1.

written these accounts. This accounts facilitates in comprehending the pre-Christian and traditional Naga society. These accounts, though valuable, are not devoid of biases and prejudices. Nevertheless, these accounts are the only substantive source available that could give reliable accounts on pre-Christian Nagas.

History of the advent and growth of Christianity have been, to a large extent, well recorded. Numerous books and articles are available on these events, which actually provides insightful pictures about the religious change and social change among the Nagas. This study is substantively based on the secondary sources that are available.

To some extent, this study is engaged with comparative analysis of two divergent religions, and the social life of a particular community over a different point of time. Certain variations in the way people believe, conduct social, and cultural practices would be accounted. This study is more of a 'Descriptive Analysis'.

Chapterisation

Broadly, the chapters have been divided into three. Each chapter focuses intensively on particular phenomenon and issues pertaining to Naga society. However, collectively, those issues and phenomenon taken up in each chapter are interconnected and coherently linked.

The focal point of Chapter One, as the title will suggest, is about traditional Naga religion. The emphasis here is to comprehend the intricacies of traditional Naga beliefs systems, and practices. The nature of Naga religion, and the descriptions that have been made about Naga religion are taken into

consideration. Conceptions of Supreme Being, Minor deities, death and Otherworld, are analyzed. Naga Cosmology is comparatively analyzed with African Cosmology. The formulations of Sacred Space and Sacred Time in traditional Naga beliefs system would be interrogated. Also religious practices pertaining to rites of passage, rituals and sacrifices have touched upon. Broadly, this chapter will look into the beliefs and practices of traditional Naga religion, taking the ethnographic accounts into considerations. This chapter gives a comprehensive account about the Naga religion before the advent of Christianity.

Chapter Two is basically an analysis of the historical accounts of the arrival of Christianity among the Nagas. First of all the relationship between Missionaries and colonialism, and the work of the missionaries will be critically analyzed. Variations between Colonialism and missionaries encounter are elucidated. The religion of Christianity, and the emergence of Protestantism are taken into account. The history of Christianity among the various Naga tribes is thoroughly discussed. Significantly, the methods and strategies that were employed by the missionaries while carrying out their work would be analyzed.

Chapter Three takes up the issue of process of social change among the Nagas. Various theories and approaches that have tried to comprehend the process of Christianization have been analyzed. Basic emphasis is made to interrogate the immediate impact of Christianity, which served as impetus for subsequent changes. The phenomena of 'religious change' and 'social segregation' are taken into account. Two substantive issues pertaining to social change that are taken up here is 'Cultural Changes' and 'Structural Changes'. This Chapter gives a comprehensive picture of overall social change among the Nagas, after the advent of Christianity.

Chapter One

TRADITIONAL NAGA RELIGION

The Nagas have been described as “primitive people”.¹ Terms like ‘savage’, ‘heathen’, and ‘uncivilized race’ have been employed to describe the features of the Nagas. Often, Nagas have been construed as the ‘Headhunters’—a social practice that was predominant throughout the Naga tribes, before the advent of Colonialism and Christianity. Apparently, the living conditions, way of life, dressing patterns, and food habits of the Nagas were in stark contrast with the world-outside. After observing the Nagas, in their traditional state, John Butler provocatively remarks:

The greater numbers of the Nagas are supposed to be in a very destitute state, living almost without clothing of any kind. Their poverty renders them remarkably free from any prejudices in respect of diet they will eat cows, dogs, cats, vermin and even reptiles, and are fond of intoxicating drinks (*Zu*).²

The Westerners/Outsiders were, it seems, at ‘shock’ to find the Nagas living in a condition that was fundamentally different from theirs’. The notions that they had had about the Nagas were clearly reflected in their writings and Official records. Their reactions to the Nagas were full of disbeliefs, shocking and romanticism.

It will be worthwhile to note that the term ‘primitive’ was a highly generalized category; not employed specifically to the Nagas. There was much ethnocentrism involved about the term ‘primitive’ which has, for many person,

¹ Furer Haimendorf. *The Naked Nagas*. Calcutta: Thacker & Spink, 1939 (p. VIII). Here, the writer might have used the term in a friendly gesture. This term, however, had been used by many other writers as well, while referring to the Nagas.

² Butler, John, *A Sketch of Assam*. 1847. Cited from Verier Elwin’s, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. London: OUP, 1969. 515.

come to connote inferiority, and, when applied to human beings, to imply the mistaken notion of mental processes which are pre-logical or qualitatively different from civilized man. These terms; ‘savage’, ‘primitive’, ‘heathen’ etc, were employed to denote the chasm that exist between the Western society and the natives of far away foreign land—the frontiers, and to describe the various features of the natives that lay outside the fold of Western civilization. It was also entangled with the Positivist notion of society moving in a linear direction. The colonialist also endorsed similar notions. They believed that what they were doing was not just about making trade or increasing the earnings, but also *civilizing the natives*.

And, obviously, the Nagas were outside the fold of the so-called civilized world, and their features resemble the people that have been often described as ‘primitive’. Thus, the term ‘primitive’ might have been considered as appropriate when applied to the Nagas. As Edward Norbeck rightly argues, “The word primitive is, however, firmly entrenched in our language. No substitute has been offered [...]”.³ Clearly, these concepts had become a part of colonialist intellectual discourse. These categories were employed with the view that ‘forest dwellers’ and tribals in India were similar to the Aborigines in Australia, Africa, and Pacific Island. And basing on the framework of ‘linear historical development’, and using the scale of Industrial production, the social formations were construed as progressing from simple to complex, primitive to modern, and savage to civilized. The knowledge of the Anthropologist was called in for helping the administration in governing these people. However, questions arose over the application of Anthropological knowledge, and its value in governance.⁴ And, ironically it became difficult for the anthropologist to device a new term that will suitably define the people that they have been

³ Norbeck, E. *Religion of the Primitive Society*. London:

⁴ SavyaSaachi, *Forest Dweller and Tribals in India*, in Susan Visvanathan, ed. *Structure and Transformation: Theory and Society in India*. New Delhi, OUP, 2001, pp. 71-90.

studying all along. Further, Norbeck argues that the term 'primitive' could be employed if the notion of 'inferiority' is annihilated. In a lighter vein, Norbeck defends that:

These expressions [Primitive culture, primitive societies, and primitive religion etc] is meant the ways of life, the social organization, and the kind of religious behavior of propels of the world who have no substantial body of knowledge; and no mechanical devices; and peoples who have little or no writing: and as a rule of thumb, people whose manners of living are crude and simple as compared with our own.⁵

Though, this understanding of the term maybe considered as more sublime, however it is not without flaws and biases. At present it has not only become unfashionable to use the term 'primitive', but also those people that have been labeled so, have undergone enormous forms of changes. This also applies to the Nagas, who has undergone varied forms of changes.

Fayuki Karusawa strongly proclaims: "The 'primitive' is dead and buried".⁶ In academia the fallacy of employing such a biased and value loaded term has already been realized. The notion of 'primitive', as a primordial stage of humanity, was an *invention* and a *construct* that came to be widely accepted, even by the people to whom the term was employed. According to Clifford Geertz:

Every man has a right to create his own image of his own savage for his own purpose. Perhaps everyman does. But, to demonstrate that such constructed savage corresponds to Australia Aborigines, Africa tribesman or Brazilian Indians is altogether a different matter.⁷

⁵ Ibid,

⁶ Fayuki Karusawa. *A requiem for the Primitive*. History of the Human sciences, vol.15, No. 3, pp. 1-24.

⁷ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretations of Culture*, New York: Basic Books, 1973 (p.347).

We can appropriately make an assumption that the Nagas were practicing a way of life that was 'unique' and 'different'. And, the description and denotations that have been made about the Nagas were the construction of that time, which has become obsolete now. The dichotomy and hierarchy that have been created has no any scientific basis.

Naga Religion

The people that have been described as 'primitive' were often considered as having no religion. In understanding Naga religion one must be aware of this fact. Among the Missionaries and Colonial officers there had been tendencies to simply disregard the religious system of the natives as 'nonsensical ideas' and 'superstitious beliefs'. In fact, it must have been difficult for anyone to comprehend the religious ideas of the people whose culture and worldview were fundamentally different.

In one of the Census report, A. W. Davies remarks: "The Angamis have practically no religion"⁸. Similar strains of views have also been shared by others, including the Christian Missionaries—who already had pre-conceived notion about other's religion. However, the ethnographers and civil servants who had lived with the Nagas and observed them in details did not endorse this view. Here, it will important to know in what sense 'religion' has been understood or defined. If religion is defined in the perspectives of historically well established religions, with certain features such as: written scriptures, well laid out doctrines and dogmas, trained priest, a place of worship etc, one can conveniently assume that Nagas have no religion. However, if religion is

⁸ Davies, A. W. *Census of India*, 1891. Cited from Verier Elwin's, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. London: OUP, 1969.

defined in general theoretical terms, as a set of ideas, beliefs and practices relating to 'GOD' as the 'Spirit' (Evans-Pritchards)⁹, one can comfortably argue that religious practices were implicitly present among the Nagas. Now, the question of Naga religion has already been laid to rest as various ethnographers has already made a significant study on this matter.

The religion of the Nagas has been labeled as "Animism".¹⁰ The belief system of the tribal people who had not adopted any historical religion was usually known as "Animism". Sir Edward Tylor, in his minimum definition of religion, defined 'Animism' as a 'belief in spiritual beings'. The Nagas, undoubtedly, had strong beliefs on the existence of "spirits". However, there are inadequacies, as this concept vaguely defines the belief system of the Nagas. Again, 'Animism' has been considered as unfashionable, as it was generally understood as the earliest form of religion, and, according to E. A Gait, it refers to a 'religion of very low type'. For the Nagas there was no specific concept or distinctive term or label to describe the religion that they have been practicing. Even their conception of the "supernatural", according to J H Hutton, is 'sublimely vague'. 'So vague is his ideas of the deities and supernatural beings which he believes, that he make no attempts to reproduce in carving or in picture the mental image which he forms of them.... Polytheist, pantheist he maybe, but he is no idolater'.¹¹

There seems to be much ambiguity with regard to the nature of Naga religion. In one of the earliest accounts, R. G Wood Thorpe remarks: 'The

⁹ While translating the Nuer's concept of *Kwoth*, Evans-Pritchards has synonymously used the term 'God' and 'Spirit'. What we need to discern here is that in this concept (Spirit) 'theistic' elements were inherently present. Evans-Pritchards, *Nuer Religion*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰ Hutton, J H. *The Sema Nagas*. London: Oxford, 1921.

¹¹ Hutton, J H , *The Angami Nagas*, Oxford,p

Nagas in general have very vague ideas of religion or future state.¹² Others have also made similar remarks about the Naga religion. For the Nagas, their religious practices were closely interwoven with the social customs and day-to-day practical life. There was no clear-cut demarcation and differentiation of 'religion' from 'social' and other institutions of society. Pertaining to religious practices, there were variations among the various Naga tribes, but as Gait opined; '[these] are differences of practices or details rather than of the fundamental principles'.¹³ Therefore one can assume that the underlying 'fundamental principles' of the belief system of various Naga tribes were inherently similar. The underlying 'fundamental principles' found across the tribal lines could be derived as: believe in the existence of benevolent and omnipotent 'Supreme deity'; the existence of malevolent and malicious 'spirits' and 'deities'; and other conceptions that can be included is general belief on the existence of 'soul' and continuity of life after death. E. A. Gait, in the Census of India 1891, one of the early accounts on the Nagas, wrote:

There is a vague but very general belief in some Omnipotent being, who is well disposed towards men, and who there therefore there is no necessity for propitiation. Then comes a number of evil spirits, who are ill disposed towards human beings, and to whose malevolent interference are ascribed all the woes which afflict mankind. To them, therefore, sacrifices must be offered. These malevolent spirits are sylvan deities, spirits of the trees, the rocks and streams and sometimes also tribal ancestors.¹⁴

We may agree with what E. A. Gait has mentioned about Naga religion. He has not been particularistic, but rather he has derived a general scheme that was applicable to all the varying tribes; and their belief systems. In this

¹² Woodthorpe, R G, *Notes on the Wild races of the so-called Naga Hills on our North East Frontier*, 1881.

¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴ E A. Gait. *Census of India 1891*. Cited from Verrier Elwin's (ed) *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Oxford, 1969.

description, two different types of deities—the ‘Supreme deity’ and ‘minor deities/spirits’ were inherently present; these were the supernatural beings worshiped by the Nagas, and different kinds of attributes were attached to them. However, different tribes employed different methods of appeasing these deities. Propitiation of these various deities constitutes an important part of Naga religion. Constantly, Nagas were trying to influence the deities for their own good. According to J P Mills, “The religion of the Ao is not a moral code. It is a system of ceremonies, and strives as he may to do that which is lawful and right in the moral spheres, he will not prosper if he omits the sacrifices due to the deities around him who, unappeased, are ready to blight his crops and illness upon him and his.”¹⁵ Thus, rituals and ceremonies were an integral part of Naga religion. However, it is disputable whether moral code was absent in Naga religion. As it has been widely noted, “Gennas’ were strictly maintained by the Nagas. ‘Gennas’ are code of conduct considered as ‘forbidden’, and all the Nagas strictly followed these codes. These were unwritten moral codes passed down from generation to generation, and act a deterrent to all the activities that Nagas carried out in their daily life. Thus, whether ‘moral’ codes were actually present or absent in Naga religion would be a contestable proposition.

Most the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Nagas, as mentioned, were aimed at appeasing the various deities. These spirits have to be appeased so that the individual could prosper and no harm would come to him, his crops and family. Here, there is an intrinsic element of orientation towards the well being of the present state. Most of the religious practices were aimed towards this end. It will not be incorrect to assume that Naga religion had ‘this-worldly’ orientation. When they observed the religious ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices; these were all aimed at the well being in this present life, there was no major emphasis

¹⁵ J P Mills. *The Ao Nagas*. Calcutta: Oxford, 1975(reprint). 215.

made on the fate of life after this world. According to Max Weber, "The most elementary forms of behavior motivated by religious magical factors are oriented to *this* world."¹⁶ Further, he argued that: "religious or magical behavior or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive conduct, particularly since even the ends of the religious and magical actions are predominantly economic." Among the Nagas, it appears that the emphasis on material gains or prosperity inherently present in their religious orientations. According to T C Hodson:

So closely knit are the bonds of society that here very distinctively "the religious acts and ideas are themselves an organic part of the activities of the social body". The ends, which their religious activity seeks to compass, are severely practical, material, as we should judge them, and are entirely social. When they perform rites to banish from their gates the dread pestilence that comes one knows not how and whence, that takes old and young, strong and weak alike for its victims, they are consciously busy with an act of social import and advantage. The village as whole takes part in the cultivation rites, and I have shown that religious duties are defined and attached to different social units. As a rule, the ends which their religious activities subserve are capable of immediate, or at least of not long deferred, realizations.¹⁷

Therefore, Naga religion has orientation towards material prosperity and the 'immediate' life. However, these rituals were extensively for social gains, and welfare of the society as a whole, and not the individual alone. Also, among the Nagas, rituals were not 'exclusively' aimed at "material" gains, however major emphasis was also made on the well being of the "physical" body, and safety; Nagas were prone to sickness and diseases which, they believed, were caused by the spirits.

¹⁶ Max Weber. *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Mathew & Co Ltd., 1961. p. 9.

¹⁷ T C Hodson. *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*. Delhi: Low Price Publication. pp. 124-5.

The absence of 'idol worship' maybe considered as one of the distinctive feature of Naga religion. Even though, Nagas worship stones and trees, it was not the object or the image that they worship, but the 'spirits' who, they believed, dwells in such places. Also, Nagas were not engaged in worshipping animals—a religious practice that is commonly followed by the followers of Hindu religion. In contrast, they were very fond of meat and ate all kinds of it, except poisonous or religiously tabooed¹⁸. This kind of food habits, actually, sets the Nagas apart from their neighbors—the Assamese and Meithei's—who followed Hinduism. However, domesticated animals were widely used and they are indispensable part to any religious sacrifices of the Nagas.

Supreme Being

Though, differential importance were laid to the 'Supreme Being', Nagas place this 'Spirit'¹⁹ on the highest place, above all other deities and mankind, occasionally invoking in different names in their own tribal dialect. For the Aos it's *Lichaba*; the Semas *Alhou*; the Angamis *Kepenopfu*, and the Tangkhuls *Kasa Akhava*. The Nagas believed that the Supreme Being is the creator of this world; generally considered as benevolent, but inaccessible, having no direct contact with the human beings; thus needs no gratification and sacrifices from man. However, among some Naga tribes, the Supreme Deity was address occasionally during the prayers and sacrifices. It will be appropriate to denote the Nagas' "Supreme Being" as the 'High God'. The High God, according to Andrew Lang, is a personal deity, separate from and altogether superior to, all

¹⁸ Nagas did not take some of the domestic animals like cats, as they considered it as bad luck to consume such meat.

¹⁹ See Evans-Prichards, *Nuer Religion*, pp. 1-3.

other deities and spirits, the master and often maker of the universe and men, the creator, the guardian of moral code, master over life and death, himself benevolent immutable.²⁰ In most of the tribal religions of India, and also among the Nagas, the 'High God' is considered as 'otiose deity', that is, he is invoked but rarely worshiped.²¹ He has become a deity who leaves the world and mankind at the mercy of the deities, spirits and demons.²²

The Supreme Being, who was considered as the most powerful by all the Nagas, was attributed with varied characters by different tribes. To the Angamis', their Chief deity, *Kepenopfu* was spoken of as a 'creator of all living beings'. Their Chief deity was believed to be the ancestress of human race, and all also of all other 'spirits and larger cats'. Most of the Angamis perceived *Kepenopfu* to be a 'female being', though others conception differs. The dwelling place of the Supreme deity was always located in the 'sky', and not 'malicious activities' or 'ill-dispositions' towards men were attributed.²³ Though, there were certain variations, trends of similarities pertaining to the conception of the 'Supreme deity' were explicitly present among the Nagas. Other Naga tribes also generally shared these attributes held by the Angami. The Semas, in semblance with the Angamis, considered *Alhou*, their Supreme deity, as the 'Creator of man'—the term *Alhou* is literally translated as the 'creator'. Though the Semas doesn't place their Supreme deity in a specific location; He was believed as residing far and inaccessible to mankind. In general, *Alhou* was considered as 'all-good', 'almighty', and 'all-knowing'.²⁴

²⁰ Fuchs, Stephen, *The tribal religion of India*. Budahadeb Chaudhury (Ed) Tribal Transformation in India, vol. 5, (Religion, Ritual, and Festivals)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hutton. *The Angami Nagas*. London: Oxford, 1968, pp.180-1.

²⁴ Hutton. *The Sema Nagas*. London: Oxford, 1969, p.194.

To the Supreme deity, thus, the creation of 'mankind', 'spirit', 'animals', and, among some tribes, the entire 'universe' was attributed. The Naga tribes of Manipur, in a certain variance, believed that the deity who 'causes earthquake' created this world.²⁵ Well, according to T C Hodson, this is 'almost a metaphysical conception, originating in a desire to find an explanation for the creation of the materials, in which, except when an earthquake rends the hills, there is but little sign of change.'²⁶ Indeed, there is coherence in attributing the 'act of creation' to the 'Supreme deity'. In a search to find an answer to the imperceptible and incomprehensible phenomena, the human mind could have conveniently bestowed this extra-ordinary work (creation) to the most powerful being (Supreme deity) in their cosmos.

The Supreme deity, therefore, was a distant deity with powerful attributes; often the 'sky' was regarded as His abode and remains inaccessible to mankind. He was considered as 'benevolent', and generally good towards mankind, but the distance that exists doesn't actually allow people to enjoy His blessings. Maybe His distance from mankind was being determined by the qualities and powers He possessed.

Lesser Spirits

The Nagas strongly believed and attached much importance to the local 'deities', 'spirits', and 'demons' that can be found in any place from rocks, trees, to streams, mountains and house. These spirits and deities reside close to mankind; they were numerous and ubiquitous. Often, these deities have been referred as 'minor deities' or 'lesser spirits' in accordance to the place they

²⁵ T C Hodson. *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*. Delhi: Low Price, 1996 (First Published 1911), p. 127.

²⁶ Ibid. p.127.

dwelled, and power they possessed. Hutton had classified the 'deities' that Angamis' worship into 'three classes':

First of all there is *Alhou* (or *Timilhou*), who seems to be regarded as a usually beneficent but somewhat remote Creator interfering little in the affairs of men, though approaching more nearly than any other to our idea of Supreme God. In the second place we have the spirits of the sky, the *Kungumi*, dwelling up aloft but far from aloof, so far so that, if ancient legends are to be believed, they have more than once formed unions with mortals.

The third class, the *Teghami*, the spirit most in touch with man, are spirits of the earth, which they inhabit, the true spirit of the occultist, often deliberately harmful, beneficent only when propitiated, though there is perhaps a tendency purely malignant spirits to take on, as a result of the habit of propitiation, the attributes of beneficent deities. This can make him good gods from bad.²⁷

Recently, this kind of classification has been often made while referring to the religion of the Nagas. The Nagas, however, had not classified 'supernatural beings' they worship into 'high/low', 'big/small', even though Nagas considered their deities 'differentially' and 'distinctively'. The 'differentiation' and 'distinction' that they make about their deities were usually based on their dwelling place (e.g. sky, trees, house etc) and their qualities (e.g. malicious, benevolent).

These 'minor deities' who had close relations with the mankind were often considered as responsible for all kinds of illness, misfortunes, and calamities including natural and unnatural. The world of Nagas, as someone has remarked, is ruled by various malignant 'spirits' and 'demons', which dwell in every nook and corner, and are ready to harm mankind at any instances.²⁸ Therefore, most of the prayers, sacrifices and rituals of the Nagas were directed

²⁷ J H Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, Calcutta, 1968, p. 190.

²⁸ Horam. *The Northeast India—A profile*. Delhi: Low price. 191.

towards the appeasement of these 'minor deities', who were responsible for people's adversities. These 'minor deities' were called by different names by different tribes; though their conception of these deities varies little. The Aos call them *tsungrem*; the Tangkhuls *kameo*; the Angamis *terhoma*; and *teghami* by the Semas.

Often, a negative picture had been painted about the 'minor deities'. In general these deities were considered as 'malicious', 'malignant' and 'ill-disposed' towards mankind. The Christian missionaries, according to Hutton, in their blindness taught the Angami converts to regard all *terhoma* as evil, and translating the generic *terhoma* into English or Assamese as 'Satan'. However, there would be fallacies in generalizing all these deities, putting them under one category, and designating them as 'bad' or 'evil'. Clearly, this involves reinterpretation of the Nagas' belief system and subversion of their deities. The qualities of these deities were by any means not as malicious as they have been painted. The Angamis, in reality, does not conceptualize their various minor deities in a generalist formulation; there were differentiation and distinction in terms of 'characters' and 'qualities' of the deities. Besides the 'Supreme deity, *Kepenopfu*, the *terhoma* (minor deities) were numerous, and highly differentiated. Among the prominent *terhoma*: *Rutzek* was considered as the 'evil one'—responsible for sudden death; *Maveno* was considered as the goddesses of fruitfulness; *Ayebi* was considered to be some sort of fairy that dwells in man's house and bring prosperity; *keri-lu-rho* was a spirit that inhabit rocks; and *Temi* was considered as a ghost that resides in death man's body, and often frightens man. There were, thus, varieties of deities with differing attributes and characters. Apart from this, 'the majority of *terhoma* are unknown by name, unspecified, vague inhabitants of the invisible world (Hutton, 1969, pp.181-3).

Therefore, the 'lesser spirits' that Nagas believed were not only numerous and ubiquitous, but also highly differentiated. Broadly, the 'lesser spirits' that Nagas worship can be differentiated into three categories; first, 'good' or 'benevolent'; second, 'bad', evil and malicious; and thirdly, just a simple deity, neutral –that does not harm or give blessings. The relation between mankind and these deities were very 'close'; however it was full of 'hostility' as well as 'friendship'. Thus, there is difficulty in generalizing the Nagas' conception of the 'minor deities', and also about the relationship between mankind and deities.

Notion of 'Death' and Otherworld

Eschatological questions are usually dealt with much inspiration, hope, and fear by most of the religions. What lies ahead after the end of this life on earth is incomprehensible to the mortals. The answer to this pertinent question of the living is appropriately taken up by religion.

It has been remarked that questions relating to 'future state' does not seem to bother much to an average Naga. 'He looks on death as the abhorrent end of everything that interest him, and neither pretends to know nor cares what comes after' (Hutton: 1969, p.185). The belief systems of the Nagas, actually had general conception about the existence of 'soul' and 'continuity of life after death'. Among the various Naga tribes, there was a belief that the soul does not die with the death of body (Horam, p.191). The Nagas believed in the existence of 'soul' as different from the 'human body', though their conception of 'soul' appears to be very vague and undistinguished. The Sema word for 'soul', *anghonyu*, was the same as for 'shadow' and 'reflection', and a man probably confused at times the soul with the shadow cast; however, the more intelligent, do not probably confuse between the two. (Hutton: 1968, p.199) There was an

unambiguous conception that the 'soul' was independent of the body, which could be captured by the spirit and also leave the body at will.²⁹ Death, as most Nagas believe, was the separation of the "soul" from the 'body'. 'At death something leaves the body. That something was regarded as a winged insect of some kind; now a butterfly, now a bee'.³⁰

The Aos regarded (dead) man as 'going himself'. An Ao would say: "Asamchiba is going to has gone to the Land of death". They did not say: "Asamchiba's soul has gone to the Land of Death"(Hutton: p.226). Thus, the Aos considered the cause of death as the departure of the soul ahead of the individual, in which the individual inevitably follows the soul. To the Aos, as well as among the other Nagas, death seems like a 'natural phenomena', which every individual must encounter. Among some of the tribes, the 'soul' or the 'ghost' of the deceased was personified as similar to the individual's living image. 'The "ghost" of the deceased is regarded as an exact image of the deceased as he was at the moment of death, with scars, tattoo marks, mutilations, and all- and as able to enjoy and need to sustenance—which are therefore given to it for a period (Hodson: 1914, p.159). Thus, the dead were conceptualized in the same way as the living; needing food and sustenance; however they were believed to be living in as different world—the Land of death—that again was considered as similar to this world.

Death, to the Nagas, seemed just like a passage into another world. It is evident from the manner death ceremonies were conducted, and also there was 'universal belief' among the Nagas about the path leading to paradise that the dead soul undertook. When a person dies, the families of the dead person kill pigs, cow or a buffalo and the animal was cut up and distributed among the

²⁹ Sickness, as Nagas believed, was caused by the capturing of the soul by some evil spirit.

³⁰ T C Hodson (1914). *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*. Low Price Publication, New Delhi, Reprint 1996 (p. 158).

clansmen and villagers; feasting, and drinking enormous amount of rice beer followed. The mourners who came to pay their last respect to the dead person, often burst out in loud crying and moaning, at times talking to the dead person (Horam: p.195). With such ceremonies as feasting and drinking, death was an expensive event for the family, and the funeral service may actually resemble a Naga festival. Significantly, during this period all the relatives and clansmen of the deceased come together to share the sorrow. Thus, this event maybe considered as an opportunity to re-strengthen the family solidarity.

The Nagas' conception of the Otherworld was quite vague and ambiguous. It was believed in general that the dead took a narrow path towards the Land of Dead. There were, however, varying ideas and beliefs about the conception of the Land of Dead. Some locate this in the 'sky', and some others on the mountains above, and to some it lies underground. 'The Changs have a future world underground. The Semas also states sometime that the good dead go to some village of the death towards the sunrise, and the bad towards the sunset' (Hutton: 1968, p.186). The Angamis too had similar beliefs, that "if they led good and worthy lives upon this earth, and abstain from all coarse food, their spirits would fly away into the realms above, and there become stars, but otherwise their bodies would have to pass through seven stages of spirit life, and eventually transformed into bees.³¹ Such beliefs were actually not uncommon among the Nagas; though their conception was incongruence with the Christian concept of 'Heaven' and 'Hell'. And, thus, it will be inappropriate to apply these terms while referring to Nagas conception of the Otherworld.

'When the dead man reach the land of dead', according to Hutton's account, 'whatever there is, he goes to his own village, of which there are

³¹ John Butler, *Rough Notes on Angami Nagas*, J. A. S. 1875, No.4vol XLIV, Cited from V. Elwin's *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Oxford, 1969.

presumably a ghostly production, and lives just as he did in this life, after presenting the chief of the village with a chicken he brought with him for the purpose (Hutton: p. 212). Again, we have similar kinds of beliefs from Mill's account of the Ao Nagas: "Life in the village of death is like life on earth, save that there is no sexual intercourse. Those who were rich are rich and these were poor are poor there"(Mills, p.231). Apart from the beliefs that there were different things in store for the 'good' man and the 'bad', there seemed to be less differentiation between the 'present world' and 'Land of Dead'. Thus, for the Nagas, life continues in the same way as it is, even in the Land of Dead.

Traditional Naga Cosmology and Comparison with African Cosmology

The 'Traditional Naga Cosmology', as formulated by Richard M Eaton, was 'characterized as a two tiered scheme consisting, at the upper tier there is supreme deity who underpinned the universe and who, though benevolent, was but vaguely understood and seldom approached'.³² The lower tier of this Traditional Naga Cosmology consisted of a host of all 'minor spirits'. These 'spirits', according to Eaton, were more sharply perceived and given far more attention precisely because they underpinned the immediate reality, which Nagas experienced.³³ In fact, this formulation of traditional Naga cosmology, as Richard Eaton acknowledged, was borrowed from the Robin Horton's scheme of 'African Cosmology', which he found useful while explaining conversion in Africa. In his scheme of 'African Cosmology', Horton described: 'I start with the idea of a basic African cosmology which has a two tier structure, the first being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the Supreme Being. The

³² Richard M Eaton. *Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas*. Indian Economic and Social History Review, 21.1 1984.

³³ Ibid,

lesser spirit underpins events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment whilst the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm—i.e. in the world as a whole'.³⁴ Astonishingly we find many similarities between the Nagas and Africans conception of the 'Supreme being' and the 'Lesser spirits'. There is actually no explanation given for the similarities between these two cosmologies.

Further, to elucidate this analogy, we can cite an example from a description, which is completely unaware of this scheme. Here, as Robert Thornton describes about religious believes of the Iraqw, an African tribe, that:

The religious conceptions of the Iraqw are, like many other aspects of their culture, unusual in East Africa. There are two spirits or supernatural beings, opposed as 'good' and 'bad', supplicable and capricious. *Lo'a* is associated with the sky, and 'above', and the sun and with rain; *netlangw* are associated with the earth, the 'below', with streambeds, springs and damp. *Lo'a* and *netlangw* are supplicated in prayers, but it is *Lo'a* who is held to be more responsive, while *netlangw* are capricious. Both may work good or evil, but on the balance, *Lo'a* is more positive and "good" of the two. In the Iraqw concept, however, they are both immanent and immaterial. It is of great significance that they are associated with directions (above-below) and with the nature (the sun, bright, and hot versus the spring, dark and cool).³⁵

Again, we see many similarities, especially in the conception of the position that different deities dwells, though there are certain variations on notions of their characters. These similarities, it can be assumed that, as African tribesman and Nagas lives close to the nature their worldviews and

³⁴ Robin Horton, *On the Rationality of African Conversion*, Africa, Vol. 45, no.3, 1975, p.217.

³⁵ Robert J Thornton, *Space, Time, and Culture among the Iraqw of Tanzania*, Academic Press, 1940, p. 7.

cosmological configuration are analogous. And, for a long time, they had remained isolated and uninfluenced from other religious belief systems.

It interesting to know that not only their 'hierarchy' i.e. above and below, but also the characters attributed to these deities i.e. malicious, malignant, or benevolent are congruent among Nagas and Africans. The importance attached to these deities is also same. The "supreme deity" was always the most powerful, and other minor deities are lesser powerful, disturbing the mankind at various instances. Now the mode of worship is again indifferent, with the lower deities enjoying all the sacrifices and prayers where as the Supreme deity was hardly addressed. Thus, this cosmological congruence was manifested in many other religious practices and customs. Also, the dealings with the natural calamities and illness among will be another interesting observation. It is quite obvious that the 'minor deities' gets all the blames for misfortune as well as sacrifices, as they were believed to be underpinning the world that surrounds mankind.

There has been some contestation pertaining to the concept of Supreme Being. It has been argued that this concept is not an indigenous one, but borrowed from Christian beliefs, as it has much semblance with Christian concept of God, the Almighty Father, the Creator, all powerful and Supreme. Apparently, there exist many similarities with the native's notion of the "supreme deity" and its place in the cosmos with the Christian beliefs. However, as Fuch has concisely put: 'The concept of a high-god is very like indigenous to the Indian tribes'.³⁶ The concept of 'Supreme deity' among the natives, as many believe, was a pre-literate and pre-Christian notion. So, there can be no doubt about the originality of this concept, even though there exist

³⁶ Stephen Fuchs, *The religion of Indian tribals*. In Budadheb Chauduri, ed. *Transformation of Tribals in India*. Vol-5.

much similarities with other forms of religious believes. The ethnographers who had done an in-depth study of the tribal way of life have also shared this view. J H Hutton, in a footnote to the concept of *alhou* –the supreme being of the Semas, comments: ‘Some locate Him (Supreme deity) in all space that is between heaven and earth, and I have heard a Sema attribute to Him the quality of omnipresence, even if not of absolute infinity, though the Sema in question was not educated or even semi-christianized.’³⁷

Thus the concept of Supreme Being had already been evolved and enshrined in their religious belief systems before they came into contact with Christianity. Among the Africans the concept of ‘Supreme deity’ was indigenous to their belief system. Robin Horton has substantiated this argument; he opined that the concept of “Supreme Being” among the Africans was a pre-literate and pre-Christian notion. In an acclaimed work, *Nuer Religion*, Evans Prichards elucidates the distinctiveness of Nuer concept of God, *kwoth*, as different from western religious understanding of God. For the Nuer, “ God is spirit, which like the wind and air is invisible and ubiquitous. But though he is not that things, he is in them in the sense that he reveals himself through them.”³⁸ The concept of God of the Nuer was totally different with the Christian notion. So, to assume that the Africans concept of ‘Supreme deity’ were analogous to Christians’ conception is a contestable issue, and it may not wholly be true.

When the natives of Africa and Asia, also the Nagas encounter Christianity there was much reinterpretation of their indigenous beliefs systems; along with this obfuscation and nullification of their deities happen uninterruptedly. The Missionaries Christianized the concept of ‘supreme deity’, and the lower spirits

³⁷ J H Hutton, *The Sema Nagas*, Oxford, p.191.

³⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, Oxford, 1962, p.2.

were all categorized as a part of Satan's group. Consequently, various form of social and cultural changes followed. The religious experience of Africans and Nagas are similar in many spheres. Therefore, the indigenous religion of the Africans and Nagas were a form of religion that was completely different from Christian religion, without any written scripture, an anointed priest, and a well-demarcated place of worship (church). When they encountered a totally 'new religion' a lot of questions were raised on their minds.

Sacred Space

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One distinctive feature emerges from the discussions that have been made on Nagas' concept of 'Supreme being' and 'minor deities'. Almost all the 'deities' and 'spirits' that the Naga's worship were accorded a specific place in their cosmos. The places and abodes that various deities are believed to be residing could be an ordinary places (house, trees, streams etc) or an imaginative ones (sky, land of death). Again, these places are based on directions—sky, trees, and mountains etc. The duration of their residence could be permanent as well as temporary. In the case of Supreme deity it was permanent; where as some of the minor deities were very mobile. It was actually not place, but the presence of the deities that makes the place as different from others.

Among the Nagas, the Supreme deity was placed on the highest position, and often his abode was directed towards the sky—very far from human beings. Therefore, there exist many spatial distances between the people and the highest god, and the relationship between the two remain far and alien. The 'sky', a place, which can be seen but not actually reached and understood by the people, was accorded to the highest God. It is highly symbolical that the Highest God occupies the highest place and remains far from mankind and all other spirits. By placing the Supreme deity on the highest place, one can assume that

ordering of the universe is done. The Nagas did not proclaim that they were ordering the universe. However, the positions and places that they bestow for various deities are largely analogous to the relationship they share. The Supreme deity residing in the sky remains far; where as the minor deities who have close relationship with the people reside close to them—in the house, tress, streams, stones etc. The abode of Supreme deity remains unchanged, but it was not so for the minor deities. Some of the minor spirits were ambiguous, capricious, and mobile. Evans-Protchards argues that as the 'God' is considered as the greatest in their universe, anything that is high was perceived to be associated with the Supreme Being. It appears that this hierarchical distinction between the 'low' and 'high' were actually based on the powers and qualities of the 'Spirit' and the 'spirits' that they worshiped.

The minor deities' dwells in close surroundings of people, some even share same place with the people. In the past, as some elders comment, they live and talk with the deities like mortals. Such notions, actually, demystifies the whole notion of 'supernatural beings'. The minor deities, who were considered as numerous, could be found in any places from stones, trees to streams etc. And, some even claimed that they have seen the deities or spirit with their own eyes.³⁹ Thus, the spirits that Nagas worship were actually not invisible, but could be seen as well. Such notions actually proved that there was close relationship between the mankind and the supernatural beings, though they may not be equals.

Among the Aos the most important of all the minor spirits was the house spirit. Generally, Nagas believed that their house were occupied and governed by a deity. The 'house-spirit' was continuously worshiped and highly respected

³⁹ Hutton. *The Angami Nagas*. Oxford, 1968. 182. It has been recorded that a person entering others house to steal was caught by the deity of the house.

by the people. This deity was considered as the overseer of the house, and look after the on going affairs and welfare of the house. While elucidating the importance of the house deity, J P Mills wrote:

Among the minor spirits, the most important is the house spirit. This is to be distinguished from the spirit of the house site (*kimung tsungrem*). A house site no matter, who occupies it, is always haunted by the same *kimung trsungrem*, but the *kitsung* is a being attached to a man which will always occupy his house, even if he moves to another village. An Ao interpreter's *kitsung*, for instance ordinarily lives with him in his quarters in Mokokchung, but accompanies him when he goes to his home in his village for a short spell of leave. Again, the only time an offering made to a *kimung tsungrem* is when a house is being built, but at least every three years or oftener if necessary, a sacrifice is offered to *kitsung*.⁴⁰

From the above description it is clear that the house owner and the house spirit occupy the same place. Thus, the individual and the deity unambiguously share an analogous relationship to the same place—house. Most of the religion subscribes to the view that God is present everywhere, but here the notion was that there is a particular deity dwelling in a given space. The house, therefore, was a place where the ordinary people and supernatural being cohabits. Thus, the house does not exclusively belong to the owner.

The house is an ordinary place, thus there is much difficulty in defining the house as a sacred place. However, in accordance with the religious beliefs of the Nagas it can be argued that the house, perhaps simple or unimpressive seemingly, has an element of sacredness inherent in it, as a 'supernatural' being resides here. In a Naga village, as it has already been mentioned, there was no place specifically demarcated for religious purposes; therefore, usually most of the rituals and sacrifices were performed in the house. As it has been argued,

⁴⁰ J P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Bombay 1968, OUP (p. 222).

'the sacred space does not even exclude non-sacred space for the same place maybe both sacred and non-sacred in different respect or circumstances.'⁴¹ The Naga house, though it varies much from a Church or temple, may be considered as a sacred place in a certain respect.

Where as, the 'house spirit' travels along with the individual among the Aos, on the other hand the Semas induce the house spirit to come along with him by offering sacrifices while leaving for another place (Hutton: 1968, p. 193). The relationship that exists between the owner and the deity was that of 'companionship' and 'guardianship'. However, the relationship changes completely when it comes to the spirits that reside in rocks, trees, and streams and outside the house. Generally, most of those spirits were considered as malicious, and ready to harm people at various instances. So, they tried to avoid those places where spirits were believed to be residing. Such places were distinctively marked and remain well aware among the people. The people often talked about any unusual occurrences relating to such places. Therefore, such places were well demarcated and differentiated from other ordinary places.

Sacred Time

At the very outset it must be known that the Nagas' concept of time vary much from what it is usually understood. To the Nagas, time was closely related and interwoven with the activities and events that happen in their society. Their notion of time was analogous to the Nuer of Africa. While analyzing the Nuer's concept of time, Evans Pritchard wrote: *'In my experience, Nuer do not to any extent use the names of the month to indicate the time of event, but generally refer instead to some outstanding activity in process of time of its occurrence e.g. at the time of early camps, at the time of weeding, at the*

⁴¹ Joel P. Pereton. *Sacred Space*. Encyclopedia of Religion, Edited by Mircea Eliade, Macmillan.

times of harvesting etc, and it is easily understandable that they do so, since time to them is a relation of activities."⁴² Similar perception of time was found among the Nagas. To the Nagas, beginning of a year was usually marked by an event, customarily the beginning of a new agricultural activity. There was actually no specific date set for such event or activities. The Semas depend upon their religious officer to proclaim the beginning of new agricultural activities, usually the *Awou*. After consulting the elder person and taking the shape of moon into consideration; he proclaim the gennas in the morning of a certain specific day, decided in advance by him (Hutton: 1968, 220). Most of the Nagas follow lunar calendar, it was taken into account not only for the agricultural and religious activities, but also for various other activities. To the Nagas time was closely linked with ecological changes, agricultural activities, and seasonal festivals, which were all complimentary to one another.

The concept of "Genna" is central to the Nagas concept of sacred time. The word 'genna; was derived from Angami word "*kenna*" which literarily mean 'it's forbidden'. The term 'genna' have often been used while referring to religious rites and rituals among the Nagas. However, this term "genna" have been employed for various purposes; from the most trivial social malpractice, to a serious breach of religious sanctions. Among the Angamis, according to J H Hutton, 'So loose is the use of the word '*kenna*' that it refers not only to the breach of the strict rule of a magico-religious observance or to the breach of social law, theft for example, but to the most trivial matter of pure utility.'⁴³

Thus, the term 'genna' was employed in various realms, from strict religious observance to trivial matter. But here, we are more concerned with the religious significance of this term, and its importance in demarcation of time

⁴² E vans Pritchard, *Nuer*, London, Oxford 1974 (p. 100).

⁴³ Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, Bombay 1968 (p.140).

and days. In traditional Naga religious set up, gennas were a determining factor in denoting the days when they can work or abstain from all kinds of activities. Genna also act as a deterrent to their daily activities and living patterns. Genna, according to A W Davies, could be broadly understood in two ways. In the *Census of India 1881* he wrote:

The word Genna is used in two ways: (1) it may mean practically a holiday, i.e. a man will say 'my village is doing genna today', by which he means that owing either to the occurrence of a village festival or some such unusual occurrence as an earthquake, eclipse or burning of a village within the sight of his own his village is in genna; (2) 'genna' means anything forbidden.⁴⁴

Genna days were, therefore, like sacred days for the Nagas. When a village or a household was observing genna all normal activities were not carried out, and all the members of the family or village observed complete abstention. No one moves out of the village and also no any stranger or anyone coming from outside was allowed to enter the village during the genna days. Also, nothing was allowed to be taken-out of the village, or taken into it.⁴⁵ Such observations, it has been argued, strengthens the solidarity of the village and re-assert their social relationships. Genna days which were observed by a certain village were held within a demarcated place. Thus, the spatial divisions of time as well as space were conspicuously manifested in such observations.

Genna days were like Christian Sundays. However, the mode of observation differs. Genna days were observed because of certain unusual occurrences or during festivals. Genna days unlike Sundays were haphazard, not predetermined and unspecified. For example, gennas observed for unusual occurrences such as earthquake, eclipse, village fire etc, cannot be forecast.

⁴⁴ A W Davies, *Census of India 1881*. Cited from Verier Elwin's *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford 1969.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

These are all chance occurrence. However such occurrence would entail strict observation of genna. Genna days were the only days when Nagas completely abstain from all kinds of handwork. Gennas were observed for various reasons, and there were various gennas associated with agricultural activities, festivals, life cycles and unusual occurrences. There were household gennas, which were observed only by a family; and village gennas, observed by the whole village, and also individual gennas, in the cases where the priest or village had to perform certain rituals. Therefore, various forces determined observation of gennas.

Genna days were usually long in period and precarious. Among the Angamis *Sekrenyi*, the first festival of the genna year, ten days of *kenna* and *penna* and five more *nanu* was observed (Hutton: 1969, 197). This ceremony was done to ensure the health of the community in the coming years. Usually gennas were observed for certain specific reason. And there were tendencies to prolong such observation. And when it comes to celebrations and ceremonies, usually it last for a week. Longevity of time seems to bother less to the Nagas.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage are essential ceremonies that confer certain social status to an individual. It marks the passage of the person through life cycle, from one role or social position to another integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny—birth, reproduction, and death. These ceremonies make the basic distinctions in all groups between old and young, male and female, living and dead, and also rich and poor.

In various society rites of passage are performed in varied forms. Among the Nagas, broadly there were two categories of rites (gennas): (a) rites which are

'essential' and 'inseparable' to an individual's life—birth, marriage, and death;(b) rites that determine the status of an individual in society, which are more or less considered as 'optional' and 'not essential' (Hutton: 1921, 211-2). Thus, among the Nagas rites of passage has dual functions; it denotes the stages of an individual's life, and the position that he holds in society. Among the Nagas performing 'Feast of Merit' was pivotal in determining the individual's status in society. However, due importance were given and strict observations were maintained during the rites pertaining to life cycles.

Birth rites. In the birth rites, the observation of restriction on foods and various other activities by the expecting parents begin right from the time when the mother was pregnant. Among the Aos not only the expecting mother, but also the father maintain restriction on foods and other activities, and the father was expected to present during the time of childbirth (Mills: 1973, 263). It was the father who perform most of the rituals; he cuts the amblical cord, washes the child, puts masticated rice in the mouth of the child, and pronounce: 'I have touch it [child] before *tsungrem*⁴⁶. No *tsungrem* can seize this child.'⁴⁷ Thus, these rites were religiously significant as it was meant for the lifelong protection, and safety of the child. An Angami women when about to deliver a child breaks the strings of beads that she was wearing, throws off all her clothes except a single clothe wrap around her like a shawl (Hutton: 1969, 214). After the childbirth the mother was kept separate from the household, her bed being separated and usually the household observed genna on the day of the childbirth. Observation of genna was essential in any rites and rituals; however in cases like childbirth it's only the household or the parents that observed gennas. Among the Semas 'when a child is born the mother observed six days genna for boys and five days for girl child (Hutton: 1968, 233). Though any newborn child was welcomed, and no harsh gender discriminations were found,

⁴⁶ A term for 'spirit' in Ao dialect.

⁴⁷ J P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Bombay; Oxford 1975 (p. 265).

being a patriarchal society parents seem to prefer and gave more importance to male child. And, again, during the birth rites certain variance according to sex of the child was followed. After the initial birth rites were over, naming ceremonies followed. On the third day of the childbirth, the Semas pierce the lobe of ear, and usually on the same day name of the child was given (Hutton: 1968, 236). While certain variance was found among the various tribes pertaining to timing of ear piercing, and naming ceremonies, these two ceremonies were closely interlocked and crucial in ascertaining the individual's place in society. Birth rites are socially significant as it entitles the membership of the individual to society. Besides, in the case of the first child, the status of parents transits as they attain actual parenthood—father and mother.

Marriage rites. Marriages among the Nagas, in their traditional society, were apparently not a private affair. Though the individual had the freedom to choose his mate, the family and clan members took the concrete decisions and were responsible for arrangements pertaining to marriage. There were various methods employed in arranging marriages according to the customs of the tribe. However, the crucial and deciding factor was to get the consent of the girl, and girl's family. Usually in most of the Naga tribes, a man intending to get married employed, or asked his parents to employ an old woman as 'go-between' with the girl's family; she makes all arrangements and there was no any formal intercourse between the two families (Hutton: 1969, 220). Thus, in the initial period there was no direct interaction between the two families. However, the family and clan members did all the arrangements pertaining to marriage. Further, before any arrangements between the families took place, omens were observed and dreams were taken into consideration; if all of these proved favorable, the families meet and 'bride-price'⁴⁸ was decided. Normally, the

⁴⁸ Among the Nagas it is a traditional practice for the groom's family to pay 'bride-price' to the bride's family.

bride price consists of spears, pigs, buffaloes, *mithans*⁴⁹ and fowls (Hutton: 1969, p.220). And, usually, a day was fixed in advance for the marriages to be carried out. Marriages among the Nagas were highly socialised affairs with the active participation of the 'age-groups', clansmen and the whole villagers. Marriage ceremonies were unusually long, and the rites could last as long as months. The Angamis usually delay consummation of the marriage even after the completion of marriage ceremonies (Hutton: 1969, 222). Marriage ceremonies were observed in minutest details and customary rites were strictly observed. The newly married couples usually moved away from the parental home and live in a newly built/separate home. Among the Aos the bridegroom built a house in advance during the cold season, and most of the marriage ceremonies were carried out in this newly built house. The social significance of marriage were: the married persons leaves *morung*—which explicitly connotes that they have departed from youthful life; it also entails responsibility, and the society bestow more confidentiality in them, subsequently they acquire certain advantages and roles which unmarried people didn't enjoy. Therefore, the married individuals were structurally demarcated from the unmarried youths.

Death rites. The Nagas gave dead a ceremonies farewell. When a man dies, on the day of the burial cattle and pigs were killed. As according to the customs and traditions of the tribe, all the relatives friends and clansmen were informed about the sad demise, and normally feast were given and the meat of the animals sacrificed were distributed to all of them. The Semas put up the skulls of the cattle killed along with the skulls of animal slaughtered in his lifetime (Hutton: 1968, 254). Apparently, such practices were done to highlight the achievements and works that an individual has accomplished, and more significantly the life that he has taken during his lifetime. Most Nagas bury the

⁴⁹ Wild Buffalos.

death by putting the body under ground, however there were some tribes (Ao, Konyak) that bury the dead on raised platforms.⁵⁰

Furthermore, along the various commodities such as cooked foods, ornaments clothes weapons, etc weapons such as spears and daos were also buried along the death bodies.⁵¹ Such equipments and weapons were presented to serve the purpose of safety and protection from the spirits that the soul of the death has to encounter on the way to another world. There was a strong believes that malicious spirits dwells on the way to other world—Land of Dead—and every dead person has to encounter such spirit. To the Nagas death was a passage into another world. Death was not an end in itself, but the beginning of a long journey that the soul of the death has to undertake till the ‘Land of Dead’. As mentioned earlier, the Nagas strongly believes in the existence of the soul and life after death. The death ceremonies and the gifts that are usually given to the dead resemble that given to individuals going for a long journey.

Status rites. As J H Hutton has mentioned, apart from these rites related to life cycle, which are ‘essential’, there are rites that maybe considered as ‘optional’, but crucial to the determining of status in society. The rite that comes foremost to this category is ‘Feast of Merit’. To a Naga performing ‘Feast of Merit’ marks an important achievement of his life. It was an event that conspicuously demarcates an individual as more successful and capable than others. Feast of merit was conducted in a long series of rites. According to Hutton:

⁵⁰ According to Mill’s account, the Aos bury their death on the raised platforms built like small huts in the outskirts of the village (Mills: 1973, 278).

⁵¹ It is a custom among the Nagas to bury most of the belongings of the death along with the death body.

The feasts are a series of ceremonies, each more important than the last, culminating in the mithan sacrifice. It is the ambition of every Ao to proceed as far as he can in the series and thereby gain for himself honor both in this life and after death, and for his clan and village the favor of the spirit and the prosperity of the great man of the past. He wins thereby the coveted right of wearing clothes, ornaments and decorating his house in particular way, and the skulls of the sacrificed animals hanging in the outer room brings prosperity not only to him but also his heirs who inherit them after him. No one but a married man can give this feast, for the wife plays an honorable and conspicuous part through out.⁵²

Feast of merit, though apparently seem like another Naga festival where a lot of eating and drinking takes place, was in fact replete with various forms of rituals, and animals were intentionally killed not just for feasting, but for sacrificial purposes as well. Paradoxically, an event that was meant to showcase the wealth and capabilities of an individual were also aimed at bringing more wealth and prosperity to him and his children. The Aos usually kept the skulls of the animal sacrificed in the outer house so that it will bring prosperity and wealth to him and his successors. According to Furer Haimendorf in Naga society,

Status is linked with wealth but it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth; a man anxious to heighten his prestige must spend his wealth lavishly. The more sacrificial animal he kills at the seasonal feast in order to provide his kinsmen and affines with meat, and more valuable are the presents which he gives to the husbands of his sister and the daughters, the higher does he rise in the esteem of the village.⁵³

Therefore, among the Nagas status and richness were measured differently, not by the possession or accumulation of wealth, but by the ability to give

⁵² J P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*. Bombay, 1973, p. 257.

⁵³ Furer Haimendorf, *Morality and prestige among the Nagas*. In M C Pradan (Ed) *Anthropology and Archaeology: Essays in honor of Verier Elwin*. Oxford, New Delhi, 1969.

away. For a person intending to increase his status in the society it became essential to perform Feast of merit. Feast of merit maybe considered as a form of rites, and a social mechanism for regulating the status as well as a measure to lessen the disparities present in the society. Among the Semas, Feast of merit consists of series of ceremonies that are hierarchical and sequentially ordered, and with the advancement of ceremonies, the status of the performer heighten (Hutton: 1968, 227-229). Among the Nagas where disparities between the people were unusually minimal, ceremonies like 'Feast of Merit' was the determining factor to an individual's status in society.

Rituals and Sacrifices

Rituals are intrinsic to any religious practices that involve communication with the sacred. Rituals are considered, in general, as 'those conscious and voluntary repetitions and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centred on cosmic structural/sacred presence.' Therefore, rituals involve action; these actions are directed towards the sacred, it is highly symbolical and social as well. According to Nobord Bocock, 'Ritual is the symbolic use of bodily movement and gestures in a social situation to express and arbitrate meaning.' Further, he argues that 'the action is social, that is it involves groups of people who share some sets of expectations in common; it is not primarily individual actions, although some of this derives its meanings from group action, yet perform in private, for example praying'. Rituals are, therefore, practices where the socially established conduits are followed. The notion of rituals that is put forward by Bocock is highly generalized, and it includes all sorts of rituals that may not be purely religious. However, here the emphasis will be on those rituals that are directed towards the sacred or religious orientations.

In the religious practice of Nagas, rituals were excessively employed in every aspect of their daily life. Rituals were, generally, performed to communicate with the malicious deities, to avert all forms of illness and misfortunes, and also to determine the future course of action yet to be undertaken. Basically, the Naga form of rituals was characterized by invocation, supplication, and sacrifice. In every ritual, it was essential, and conspicuously made that the names of the spirits or deities in question were invoked. The Aos usually, 'Prayers began with an invocation to the moon and sun, the spirits of the village and field, and the fate or the double of the sacrifices' (Mills; 1973, p.215). However, incomparable importance was given to the spirits, whose blessings, kindness, and interventions were sought. While performing the rituals for the relief from sickness the performer holding '*chunga*' address the *tsungrem* (spirit) as follows: " So and so (naming the patient) has been caught by you. I am going to take you such and such offering. If you let me take him back [...]'⁵⁴ Thus, the spirit was addressed to, and supplicated by the performer on behalf of, and for the sick person. It is evident from the manner in which invocations were done that the spirits were solely responsible for the sickness, thus relieve from that sickness lies in the spirit only. Therefore the spirits were spirit supplicated and sacrifices were offered to them. Further, the performer 'is handed a fowl—a cock if a sow is to be sacrificed, and a hen if a pig is the victim—which he waves over the patient, repeating the above prayer again. This fowl he takes outside the house and begins to pluck alive announcing as he does so the object of the sacrifice.'⁵⁵ In every ritual of the Nagas, killing of fowl seems to a common practice, and constitute an important part. Killing of fowl seems to be a part of the ritual and not sacrifice in the real sense. However, it was important that blood was shed; something was killed for the purpose.

⁵⁴ J P Mills, *The Ao Nagas*. Bombay; Oxford, 1971, p. 234.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.234.

And the communication to the spirit was done through the performance of this act.

Rituals were extensively employed in those matters that may be considered as trivial and common. For, example, an Angami hunter returning home after a successful hunt performs certain forms of rituals before entering his house: "When he [the hunter] reaches his home he deposits the head of the animal inside the door and his wife or some other women brings *zu*⁵⁶ in a gourd and pour it into a *pfenouiyi*' cup held by the huntsman, who pours the liquor over the animal's head with the words: 'That the magical animal has been killed; let me kill more'."⁵⁷ Such rituals were considered essential by the Nagas, and performed without fail. And, such rituals seem to occupy an important place in their religious practice.

Sacrificing cattle and animals constitute an integral part of Naga ritual. Sacrifices were done for various reasons; but only for cases that are considered as serious, in which mere rituals were insufficient for the purpose. Usually, while making a sacrifice the advice of 'medicine-man' was taken into consideration. In Naga religion, the role that sacrifices play was pervasive.

Sacrifice is understood as a religious rite in which an object is offered to the divinity in order to establish, maintain, or restore a right relationship of man to sacred order. Sacrifice, in a deep religious understanding, may even include sacrificing 'self' for the service of divine being. However, among the religions of the indigenous religions, sacrificing of animals was the most common; in some cases humans were also sacrificed.

⁵⁶ Rice Beer.

⁵⁷ Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, Calcutta, Oxford, 1968, p.240.

Sacrifice among the Nuer, according to Evans Pritchards, fall into two broad categories:

Most sacrifice are made to prevent some danger hanging over people for example on account of some sin, to appeased an angry spirit or at the birth of twins; or to curtail, get rid of misfortune which has already befallen as at times of plague, or acute sickness. On all such occasions the spirit may intervene, or intervenes for better or more often for worse on the affairs of man, and its intervention is always dangerous.⁵⁸

Sacrifices were, thus, intentionally employed as means to induce the spirits, and intervene in their favour. Here, sacrifices were basically employed for two distinctive reasons: (a) to 'prevent' or 'avert' the impending dangers coming their way, (b) to put an 'end' or 'get rid of' the misfortunes that they are undergoing. However, the underlying principles here seem to be utilisation of the power of the sacred. It will be important to know: to whom the sacrifices were made; what is sacrificed; who made the sacrifice; and the relation between the sacrificer and spirit (god).

The Nagas made sacrifices for certain specific reasons and with clear intentions. Most of the sacrifices were aimed at appeasement of the deities in question. One of the most conspicuous forms of social practice among the Nagas was 'head-hunting' or 'head-taking'. It has been argued that headhunting was closely associated with the prosperity of the community and crops. The underlying belief in headhunting was understood as that of sacrifice, and governs by 'the notion that the killing of human being is conducive to the prosperity of the community and crops'.⁵⁹ According to Hutton's account, which is in congruence with this argument, among the Aos: "A ceremony which clearly illustrate that taking heads brings prosperity, was performed

⁵⁸ Evans Pritchard, *The Nuer Religion*, New York: Oxford, 1950, p.200.

⁵⁹ Hutton. *The Angami Nagas*, Bombay; oxford, 1968, p.259.

every year by the *Chongli*, and by the *Mongsen* whenever the crops show signs of falling, or the village has to be purified after an “apotia” death.”⁶⁰ Performance of such kinds of ceremonies elucidates that in their belief system ‘head-hunting’ had close connection with good harvest.

A W Davies, Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills in 1898, records that: “There can be no doubt that all the tribes in this district that by killing a human being in certain cases they are doing the most effectual thing towards averting the displeasure of some particular evil spirit (*terhoma*).”⁶¹ Further, he records that ‘There is a very general superstition among the Angamis and Semas that to kill a human being and place a small portion of the flesh in the murderer’s field is a specific to ensure a good crop...murders like these partake of the nature of sacrifices, as their object is to avert disaster so as to ensure good crops.’⁶² From the accounts that are available it will be appropriate to assume that the practice of ‘head-hunting’ was a form of sacrifice associated with the prosperity of the community, and fertility of the crops. However, there could be various other reasons why ‘head-hunting’ was practiced; it will be fallacious to assume that this practice was solely for the purpose prosperity, and good harvest. Human sacrifice, according to the record, was practiced by some of the tribes, but it was uncommon and rarely practiced.

Besides this, there were various other forms of sacrifices, involving killings of domesticated animals being carried throughout the year. Further, sacrifices can be broadly demarcated into ‘personal’ and ‘social’. Of course, it is difficult to have distinct demarcation as these two forms of sacrifices overlaps, as in any sacrificial ceremonies the participation of people were unusually large. Of all the form of sacrifices, the sacrifices pertaining to sickness seemed to be

⁶⁰ Mills, *The Ao Nagas*. Bombay: 1973, p. 254.

⁶¹ Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, Oxford, Calcutta, 1969, p. 160.

⁶² Ibid.

conspicuously personal, and most common. Of course, there were various other sacrifices oriented towards individual's prosperity, and life cycle; however, these were performed occasionally. Sacrifices oriented towards the well being of the whole village maybe considered as 'social sacrifices', which may includes all those sacrifices performed by the village for events such as: unusual occurrences; agricultural practices; good health and safety for the coming year; seasonal festivities etc. In most of these sacrifices, the offerings were made to the deities who were responsible for the problems, and also could safeguard the people from unforeseen misfortunes. What was being offered during the sacrifices were cattle, fowls, and, sometimes, human heads. In minor sacrifices the individual would carry out the rituals; however, when it comes to sacrifices involving clan or the whole village, there were 'religious officials' appointed for such purpose, and they carry out the rituals.⁶³ Sacrifices were done for certain specific purposes, so that the spirit may intervene and change the course of tide. Implicit here is the belief that the one who was supplicated, and the offerings made, have the abilities to protect and act; thus interference was sought.

Naga religion, therefore, was a distinctive religion, with its unique orientation towards life. In this chapter, an effort has been made to have comprehensive understanding of Naga religion. Emphasis has been made on the major religious beliefs and practices that Nagas were following during the pre-Christian period. Christianity was undoubtedly the first 'other' religion that Nagas encountered; it will be worthwhile to know how Naga religious beliefs and practices responds, and enter into dialogic conversation and confronts this totally 'new religion', which the Christian Missionaries relentlessly propagated.

⁶³ J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Bombay, 1973, p. 243.

Chapter Two

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN NAGA SOCIETY

Proselytisation can be considered as a unique feature that distinctively demarcates Christianity from all other forms of religious belief systems. However, it will be fallacious to presume proselytisation as exclusive to Christianity. Historically, there had been many religions that had tried to increase its fold and spread to other parts of the world. Stephen Neil, in his book *Christian Missions*, argues that ‘most of the religions of mankind have been local, and even tribal in their nature...three religions alone seems to form the exception, and to have been missionary and universal in their outlook from the beginning – Buddhism, Christianity, Islam.’¹ Further, he points out that ‘Christianity alone has succeeded in making itself a universal religion’, though it originates from the Mediterranean, it has ‘found a home in every country in the world; it has adherents among all the races of man, from the most sophisticated of the Westerners to the aborigines of the inhospitable deserts of Australia; and there is no religion of the world which has not yielded a certain amount of converts to it’.² The claim that Christianity is a ‘universal religion’ can be contested from various quarters; but universalistic perspectives were inherently present in Christianity. And, the people that engendered this phenomenon were the dedicated and devout Christian Missionaries.

In the annals of colonial history, Christian missionaries were a legendary figure. The executions that they have faced, and sacrifices that have been made while carrying out their *missions* were highly exemplary and inspiring. And, the impacts that they have brought among the natives who embraced this new religion were massive, dramatic, and far-reaching. However, for long Christian

¹ Stephen Neil, *Christian Missions*; Penguin, pp. 13-14.

² *Ibid.*, p.14.

missionaries have been taken as an agent or a part of the colonial project. The relationships that exist between the colonialist and missionaries have been construed as 'mutual' and 'complimentary'; and they have been accused of following a common agenda i.e. *civilising mission*. It has been recorded that from the very beginning when merchant ships landed on the foreign shore, Christian missionaries were usually present. At the initial encounter, the natives had great difficulty in understanding the real motives and intention of these White men with a Bible; and they were unable to differentiate them from the White men with a gun. The people, as Lal Dena puts, had tendencies to make no distinct variations between the two. He argued,

In the nineteenth century Christian missionaries and colonialism seemed to follow upon each other. It is for this reason that in the eyes of the many African and Asian people colonialism was seemed to assume both the role of a 'politician' and a 'priest' and Christian missionaries appeared to be a part of the expression of Western colonial expansion.³

There are divergent views on the relationship that exist between the missionaries and colonialism; it seems that rigidity and permanence were not there in their relationship. And also there is difficulty in clubbing the two as one, as their ideologies were fundamentally different – one is a religious organisation, and the other a political set up. David Zou argues that the relationship between the two 'were based on temporal process of conditional reciprocity. It did not germinate from their ideological confluence, but grew out of necessity and expediency. The moment the missionary movement threatened the stability, the government did not show any hesitancy to curb such mission movements.'⁴

³ Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India with Particular reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947*, Shillong, 1998 (Preface).

⁴ David V Zou, *Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on the Northeast India*, Religion and Society, vol.48, no. 2, June 2003.

The British East India Company, from the beginning, had reluctances in introducing and imposing alien religion to the natives, for the fear that it might threatened their position, as it had happened with other Colonial powers. It was only in the year 1813 that an Act was passed in the British Parliament, which finally open the *fields* of India to the Missionaries.⁵ However, it was not an easy process, this Act came only after a lot of campaign and hard work from the religious group in England. Once the Missionaries came to India, however, the relationship between the two transfigured to large extent: in some instances there was 'fusion' of these two divergent ideologies⁶, and on the other they were confronting and clashing with each other. Lal Dena argues that there is difficulty in generalisation as relationships between colonialism and Christian missionaries 'differed from mission to mission and country to country'.⁷ Considering the 'mode of interventions', he formulated the relationships that missionaries shares into three groups: (i) total collaborationist (ii) partial collaborationist and (iii) non- collaborationist.⁸ Therefore, in this case the task of generalisation seems difficult, even if applied it might turn out to be fallacious. However, in whatever they do, their intention appears to be coherent; they had tried to change a society and civilize people in their own (Western) likeness. While elucidating the sameness and coherence in their approach, Rowena Robinson puts:

⁵ John William Kaye, *Christianity in India: A Historical Narrative*, London; Smith, Elder & Co., 1859, pp. 257-300. The Emancipation Act, which allows Christian Missions to carry out their *mission* in British India, was passed in 1813, after a lot of hard works and campaigns by the 'Chaplan Sect', which was composed of few dedicated Protestant leaders. Though, their proposals was viewed with much scepticism by the Ex-governor Generals of British East India Company, like Warren Hasting and others, and faced strong oppositions from East India Company, fortunately they had the support of the people of England, so finally the Act was passed after an in-depth enquiry by a Committee, and much deliberations in British Parliament.

⁶ Susan Visvanathan, *The Homogeneity of Fundamentalism: Christianity, British Colonialism and India in the Nineteenth*, Studies in History, 16, 2, n. s. (2000) Sage Publications, New Delhi. The 'fusion' happens when the soldier suddenly or occasionally takes up the Bible and began to preach, and when the 'field' for the mission was turned into 'British colonies'.

⁷ Lal Dena, *Colonialism and Christian Missions: A study of Missionary movement in Manipur and Lushai Hills*, PhD Thesis, CHS, JNU, 1983, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2

Missionaries were associated with the colonial order in several respects. Though, they interacted closely with the local people, often took Indian foods, learnt Indian languages and visited Indian homes, their separateness was highlighted through their distinct lifestyle and living patterns. In fact, missionaries believe in maintaining their separateness – their particular approach to dress, time and organisation of domestic space – for they perceived it as being a necessary part of Christian upbringing and Western culture and civilization. The missionary project therefore involved, as a part of the same deal, the civilization of the converts through their initiation into particular practices that centred around, for instance, clothing and building.⁹

There is a question that is seldom asked i.e. what were the relationships that missionaries and colonialist had with the natives, and what were their orientations towards them? Even when the missionaries and colonialist were in good terms, they have followed different visions, applied contradictory methods in their civilizing acts, and shared completely different relationships with the natives. Samuel Jayakumar argued that ‘While the colonialist aimed at the reformation of the Indian society through knowledge, the Missionaries desired the transformation of the individuals, families, and communities through conversion to Christian faith’.¹⁰ Therefore, the Colonialist method of changing the society was different from the missionaries’, and even if education was a tool for both of them, their ulterior motives appears to be contrasting; while the Colonialist hopes to produce clerks, the Missionaries would invariably like to see them as Christians or native missionaries. Making a clear distinction in their approach, Maina Chawla Singh argues that: “While both believe in White supremacy on the assumption that Western culture was superior to Other cultures, they differed in their beliefs about how far the other cultures ought to be ‘reformed’ or

⁹ Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2003, p. 59.

¹⁰ Samuel Jayakumar, *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Sources for Contemporary Debates*, Regnum International, Oxford & ISPCK, Delhi, 1999, p. 92.

‘redeemed’.’¹¹ When it comes to the question of eradicating social evils like *sati*, Susan Visvanathan puts that: ‘The later (Colonialist) would legalize change when it becomes inevitable. The missionaries were catalyst in that they provided motivations and impulses to the possibilities of change.’¹² In many cases, they seem to be working in co-operation with each other, as in cases where attempts were made to eradicate social practices or phenomena that was not according to their desires or likeness. These cooperation, however, must be seen as growing out of ‘necessity and expediency’, and theirs’ embedded notion of White supremacy. Legislations, militaristic interventions and various administrative mechanisms were tools at the hands of the colonialist; where as the missionaries would indulge in street preaching, publishing, translation, in certain cases inducements through material incentives, and teaching the converts to abandon their old life. While the colonial methods were imposition from ‘outside’ or ‘above’, the missionaries were employing the methods of changing from ‘within’ and ‘below’. It is in this perspective that the role of Christian missionaries and their relationships with the natives ought to be seen. While the encounter between the natives and colonialist were more of ‘political’ and ‘commercial’ in nature; the missionaries had much to do with the beliefs systems and social life. Though, such differentiation may seem to be over-generalisation, their modes of interaction and orientations show distinct variations. Recalling an early encounter with a missionary, a Prince of Siam narrate the following incident:

Said the Missionary: “ Do you know that your religion is wrong, and can only lead you to hell?

Some members of the crowd probably disgusted at such a question moved away. Others laughed and asked, “What shall we do to avoid hell?”

¹¹ Maina Chawla Singh, *Religion, Gender, and ‘Heathen Land’*, p.40.

¹² Susan Visvanathan, *The Homogeneity of Fundamentalism: Christianity and British Colonialism in Nineteenth Century India*, Studies in History, 16, 2, n. s. (2000) Sage Publications, New Delhi.

The Missionary, 'You must venerate Jehovah, and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ'.

"And what is the teachings of Jesus Christ?"

That was the desired question, and out came the books and pamphlets, which the missionary handed over to his interrogator. He said, "If you follow these teachings, you will go to heaven".¹³

Therefore, the missionaries were essentially messengers with a message. In their interaction with the people, they entered into dialogic conversation and, deliberately, tried to change their beliefs. Overtly, they may manifest as an agent or mediator, and social reformer. However, beneath the surface they were carrying a "message", and they were trying to convey, and disseminate it in various ways and means. Therefore, the encounter with a missionary should not only be seen through the lens of culture, but more significantly as 'religious encounter' – meeting of two divergent religions. Thus, "Evangelism" has been aptly described as '*the work of presenting the Christian gospel to people living in the western lands and in the neighbourhood of the churches*'.¹⁴ Before proceeding into the History of Christian missionaries in Naga society, let us briefly examine Christianity – the religion.

Christianity: A Brief Overview

Christianity is considered as a "historical" religion; unlike other religions, Christianity is intrinsically embedded into history, and has well laid out history. Even the *Holy Bible*, the religious text of the Christians worldwide, is pervasively historical in its narratives. Taking into account of the significance of history in Christianity and other Semitic religions, Ninian Smart puts that: "It was in history

¹³ George Bradley McFarland, *Historical Sketch of Protestant Mission in Siam 1828-1928*, White Lotus, Bangkok, (Reprint) 1999, p.3.

¹⁴ Leslie J. Dunstan, *Protestantism*, George Braziller, New York, 1961, p.175.

above all that they perceived the acts of God. Similarly, in Christian doctrine and mythology historical event of the life of Christ are crucial to the formation of religion.”¹⁵ Therefore, Christianity was not only was a ‘historical’ religion, but it also has been intensively engaged in historical events.

Considering both in its history and its contemporary expressions, Christianity has been considered as a system of faith, of hope, and of love, a pattern of belief, a community of worship and way of life. As a system of religion, Christianity manifest ‘faith’ in all the various meanings that this term has acquired in the history of religion: as a loyalty to the divine; as the confidence that God is trustworthy in truth and love; as dependence of father of Jesus; who is the source of all good in this life and in the life to come; as the commitment to direct thought and action in accordance with the divine word and will.¹⁶

Christianity has also been defined as “monotheistic faith...essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by the Jesus of Nazareth”.¹⁷ Though, certain opinions may differ, the doctrine of ‘monotheism’ and pre-eminence of Jesus Christ constitutes an integral part of Christian believes. Christianity originates with the Jews, who have been considered as the God’s ‘chosen’ people, according to Biblical account. It has been argued that in its origin ‘their religion was like that of any other primitive religion. They felt that *manna* pervaded certain sacred and mysterious object...they venerate stone pillar as life giving power and cajoled personal spirits ...for these divinities dwells in nature and in the sky’.¹⁸ Thus, the religion of the Jews in its origin was invariably much like any other tribal religion. However, with the unfolding of time, much significant

¹⁵ Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Collins, New York, 1969, p. 240.

¹⁶ See *Christianity*, Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol-3, Edited by Marcie Eliade, Macmillan, New York, 1987.

¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹⁸ Ninian Smart, p.340.

developments occurs in their religion, which would have unfathomable impact on various people of this earth. With the arrival of various Prophets, Kings that culminated with the coming of the Son of God changed the their beliefs systems completely. These events were vividly recorded in the *Holy Bible*, the most authoritative text of the Christians worldwide. The prophets under the infallible guidance of God, according to Christian believes, composed the *Holy Bible*.¹⁹ Thus, the beliefs and practices of the Christians were centred on the writings of the *Holy Bible*.

The doctrine of ‘monotheism’ in Christianity seemed to go back as far as the Jewish primitive religion. Although, they had used various names to refer the divinities they worshiped, it was the concept of *Yahweh* that actually gave shaped to monotheistic belief. “*Yahweh* was not merely an ethnic God...he is the Lord and Creator of all.”²⁰ In the *Holy Bible*, in the narration of the story of creation, we see an explicit confirmation of monotheistic beliefs.

In the beginning the God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without any form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved on the faced of the water. And God said, ‘Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.’²¹

And, the act of Creation goes on till the creation of ‘Man’ – the most perfect creature. Here, in this text and narration, we discern the reference to a God, who is Supreme and timeless. The oneness of God was emphasized time and again in the Biblical text. Implicit in their monotheistic belief is the notion that the ‘God’ whom they worshiped is the *only true* God, where as all other gods and

¹⁹ Ibid., p.338

²⁰ Ibid., p. 366.

²¹ Genesis 1: 1-5, *The Holy Bible*

spirits are *fallible and inferior*. The missionaries carried this message wherever they went, and used as a tool to encounter new religion.

It has been argued that the actual history of Christianity began with the Jesus of Nazareth. His birth, teachings, death, and resurrection are the focal point of modern Christian beliefs. However, the historicity of these events, and the life of Jesus Christ have been smeared with controversies and questions. In the *Holy Bible*, Jesus has been referred as the Son of God, who came into this world to *save* the sinners from doom, and restore the lost relationship between 'Man' and 'God', which had resulted due to the 'Fall of Man' in the 'Eden Garden'. Thus, the role of Jesus Christ as the 'Savior' had been taking the role of the 'mediator' between ordinary man and the Holy God. From the Bible, we can analyse the notion of Christ having two "natures" divine and human; he was simultaneous 'one in being' with God, and one in being with humanity, and therefore often mediates between them. This relationship between Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners was explicitly recorded in the *Holy Bible*.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believed in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.²²

The church is an institute of import to the Christians. However, the exact origin of church lies in obscurity. Every church claims its derivations from Jesus. The social and religious significance of church is that it forms a single society with the citizens of the Heaven; and act as an extension of God's Kingdom; thus possessing certain *divine authority*. Basically, the church is a community in a particular place; this community is the church of God; and the realities are heavenly, the church with its worship and sacraments thinks 'itself as the viable, essential expression of those people whose true homeland is

²² John 3: 16, *The Holy Bible*, (New King James Version).

heaven'.²³ Thus, in a true Christian belief the church can be appropriately considered as 'sacred space'. The church, however, also occupies the center stage for the entire social activities of the Christians. However with the emergence of *Papacy*²⁴ the role of Church transformed into a center of power and enters into political spheres. The emergence was indeed an important landmark in the history of Christianity. Though, there was no any direct reference to the authority and legitimacy of the Pope in the Holy scriptures, they claimed that the position Pope holds derives from the authority that Jesus Christ had bestowed on St Peter, as the leader of the church, and the head of the 'Twelve disciples'. The rise of Pope as the religious head of the Roman Catholics had been gradual, with the turn of events attaining political role as well. However, the exercise of power by Pope, and authority of the Church came under attack during the *Reformation* period, which subsequently led to the formation of Protestantism. And, the first tenet of Protestantism has been the rejection of Papal authority, and diversion of emphasis on the individual's will and free spirit.

Protestantism. Protestantism emerged as a reaction to the religious doctrines, and structure of religious organisation that was in existent during the Papacy. Protestantism has been considered as the youngest and of recent origin, of the three major divisions – Catholic, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. The peculiarity of Protestantism lies in its precarious nature of organisations and divisions within. However, as some have argued, the best way to put Protestantism together is to consider it as a form of Western religion that rejects the authority of the Roman Papacy. The term Protestant has been applied to the adherents of

²³ See *Church: Ecclesiology*, Encyclopaedia of Religion, vol-3, edited by Mercia Eliade, Macmillan, 1987.

²⁴ The Papacy is the central governing institution of Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of pope, the bishop of Rome. The word *papacy* is medieval in origin and derives from the Latin *papa*, an affectionate term for "Father". See *Papacy*, Encyclopaedia of Religion, (Ed) Mercia Eliade.

Reformation stemmed from the ‘*protest*’ voiced at the Diet of Spencer (1529) by the Lutheran estates.²⁵

One of the basic tenets of Protestantism deals with the relationship between man and God.

Protestantism rests firmly upon the belief that God deals directly with man as a person, so that salvation is gained “by faith alone”. This puts the emphasis firmly on the man’s own life as it is lived in the relationship to his society and his world. In one sense man become center of his religion. Man as he is and in his situation’, bears a living relationship to God. Therefore, man must express his religious faith in ever changing forms of thought and action.²⁶

Protestantism’s focal point was on the ‘free spirit’ of man as the ‘source of authority for his religious spirit’. Though, Protestantism propagated and followed such doctrines they also honor the significance of the institution of church. However, one major historical achievements of Protestantism has been independence form the Papal authority. ‘Protestants insists that man’s dependence for eternal welfare is in God almighty alone; nothing can come between God and man except a medium through which God works, a medium which cannot become authority over man, even though Gods authority maybe transmitted through them’.²⁷ It was *Reformation* that determines the establishment of Protestantism. There were three well-known individuals that led this movement – Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. Though Protestantism was basically a religious movement aimed at reformation of Christianity, it was also smeared with struggle for political autonomy and sovereignty of the emerging nation-states in Europe. It coincided with the Industrial Revolution and the dawn of Modernity in Europe. All these phenomena influence the ideas of individual’s freedom both within and outside

²⁵ See *Reformation*, Encyclopaedia of Religion, Edited by Marcia Eliade, Macmillan.

²⁶ Leslie J Dunstan, *Protestantism*, George Braziller, New York, 1961, pp. 9-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.* , p.35.

the church. Therefore, many forces outside of the Church influenced Protestantism.

In the initial period, Protestants were reluctant to take part in missionary activities. The reasons that have been given were; that Protestants were engaged in defending themselves against the Roman church; Reformation churches were national churches and national churches see themselves in a particular way with limited responsibilities which do not extend beyond the borders of their nation in which they are set.²⁸ However, with the establishment of various Missionary Societies, Protestants began to take active participation in Missionary works. Notably, it was William Carey who not only propagated for using the “means” to carry the gospel to the ‘heathen’, but also went to India and established Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, at Serampore. From then there was no looking back.

Among the Nagas, the American Baptist Missionaries brought Christianity; they were Protestant Missionary based in Burma. Their actual intention was to Christianize China. They came to Naga Hills at the invitation of the colonial officers.

Arrival and Growth of Christianity among Nagas: A historical account

Before the advent of Colonialism and Christianity, the Nagas were living in stark isolation from the world outside. Ironically, even the zealous Christian missionaries were unaware of the people whose life they were going to change forever. The entry of Christian missionaries into the Naga Hills was a

²⁸ Ibid. , p. 175.

serendipitous discovery, un-envisaged and borne not out of deliberate action or will. However, if we analyze the historical and political situation of that time, it will be hardly be surprising to see that Nagas were unknown.

The Nagas were arguably an indomitable race, known for their practice of head hunting, villages constantly warring with each other, with a strong quest for political autonomy. Geographically, their nearest neighbours were the Ahom civilization of Assam; however, even close proximity with them for nearly 600 years had also failed to make effective influence on Naga culture. More often than not, their relationship with the external powers was marked by 'hostility' rather than 'friendship'. In such a situation, Nagas had the comfort of practicing their indigenous social, cultural and religious life. And, they remained untouched and unhampered by external forces. Internally, Naga society was divided into various linguistic groups. As Furer Haimendorf aptly summed up,

To the Naga, mankind appears sharply divided between the small circle of his co-villagers and clansmen, from whom he expects assistance and to whom he is bound by a number of obligations, and the entire outward world consisting the people of his own tribe living other village as well as people neighbouring tribes, who are his potential enemies and also potential victims of head haunting.²⁹

Therefore, Nagas were not only isolated from the outside world, but also there were internal structure that demarcates the society into 'in' groups and 'out' groups. However, it served as formidable impediments to the emergence of any domineering authority that could exercise control over vast areas. Even their religion was subservient to this social structure. As Richard Eaton put forward that Naga religion systems were 'locality-specific' i.e. highly

²⁹ Christof Von Furer Haimendorf, *Morality and Prestige Among the Nagas*, in M C Pradhans's *Archaeology and Anthropology: Essays in Honour Of VerrierElwin*, OUP, New Delhi, 1969.

elaborated aspect to the immediate localized microcosm to which the village lived.³⁰ Thus, there was much coherence between the religious practice and existing social structure and political system. However, this equilibrium undergoes transformation when the colonial power along with the missionaries enters the scene with new power, new religion, and different *vision*.

To understand the arrival and nature of Christian Missionaries in Northeast India, F. S. Downs points out that one must begin with the Treaty of Yaddo which was concluded between the East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma on 24 February 1826, at the end of the First Anglo-Burmese war.³¹ This Treaty gave East India Company an enormous authority over the Northeast region as they were under the control of Burma. The expansion of the British East India domain into the eastern side led to the opening up of Northeast region, which was hitherto unknown. There were, as Downs puts, two major significance of British expansion: it was for the first time that Northeast region was directly linked with the major Indian powers; and the entire area that was previously fragmented politically was brought under one administration. Importantly, it also brought the tribals of this region within the purview of British colonialism. When the British finally annexed Assam in 1892, they also inherited many problems of the Ahoms, the then rulers of Assam, mainly that of dealing with the Nagas who dwells on the far flung mountainous areas.³² The warring Nagas repeatedly conduct raids in the Assam valley, which causes much disgust and problems to British and their infant tea plantations in Assam. Initially, the British had no interest in annexing the Naga Hills, but events forced them. Again, it was raids upon their stations in the plains that compelled them to move into the hills. Efforts to stop the raids of the nagas by denying

³⁰ Richard M Eaton, *Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas* (

³¹ F S Downs, *History of Christianity in India Vol 5, Part V: North east India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, CHAI, Bangalore, 1992, p.6

³² Ibid. , pp. 6-7.

access to plain markets were unsuccessful. Analyzing, the policy and response of British towards the Hill areas of Assam, F S Downs aptly puts:

The British tried numbers of means, including punitive expeditions, denial of access to plains, markets and establishing a chain of border outposts, but none of them succeeded in ending the raids. Finally, those who advocated 'forward policy' of annexation and direct administration were given official permission to proceed and the hill areas were gradually subdued. After that, the government insisted that for the economic reasons only minimal administrative structures should be maintained. The British attitudes towards the activities of Christian missions in the hill areas was influenced by *pacification at the minimum cost to the government.*³³

This was how Christianity finds its way on the Hills of Northeast India. It was actually the inability of the Colonialist to 'pacify' and take effective measures to curtail the ferocious nature of the tribals that forced them to seek other means and gave the missionaries an ample opportunity to go ahead with their work. In the end, as one appropriately assumed, that it proved beneficial for both of them. It was fortunate for the East India Company, as they don't have to invest much to the Christian Missionaries. And, the Missionaries got a new field, and an opportunity increased their hold. As argued before, the co-operation grew out of 'necessity'

The Officers posted in Assam moved the proposals to the Government of India for inviting missionaries. David Scott, Chief Commissioner of Assam, in his letter to the Government of India in 1825, made a novel plan to invite Missionaries to start humanitarian activities among the hill tribes of Assam. The main underlying intentions of David Scott was that 'no good could be obtained by other means than gosselling' and took it as the only means 'for taming the

³³ F S Downs, *Northeast India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, p.17

unruly tribes'.³⁴ Further, Scott not only pleads and persuades the Government for supporting the Christian Missionaries, but he himself had supported the missionaries on his own as well.

Meanwhile, at the mission front, William Carey had already arrived and established Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) at Serampore in Bengal. The most substantial missionary activity before 1830, as Downs conclude, was that of Serampore mission and BMS.³⁵ They also had the first opportunity to work among the hill tribes of Northeast, with whom British had great difficulty in dealing. A formal invitation was send to the Serampore Mission by Capt Jenkins, who was incidentally persuaded by Bruce, inviting them to open schools in Sandiya, Assam.³⁶ However, the Serempore Mission declined to take up the task as they were going through a difficult phase in financial matters, nevertheless they suggested that the American Baptist Mission stationed in Burma might be willing to take up the offer. Therefore, the invitation to work among the hill tribes was redirected to the American Baptist Mission in Burma, with whom Capt Jenkins had supposedly good relations. Meanwhile, the American Baptist Mission, who had been making a futile attempt to enter China, willingly accepted the invitation. Subsequently, two missionaries were given the task of carrying out mission works in Assam; they were Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter.³⁷ It is said that American Missionaries were having some hard a time in Burma, and they had been looking for various means and ways through which they could penetrate China, which unfortunately had been unsuccessful all the time. Thus, they envisaged that working with the Shan tribes of Assam could give an access to the southern parts of China. With this, they proceeded with the plan and readily accepted the

³⁴ David Zou, *Missionary Planters, Gospel Seed, and Indigenous Soil*, Zomi Christian International, Vol.7, No. 3, May/June, 2003.

³⁵ F. S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1987, p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Milton S. Sangma, *History of Baptist Mission in Northeast India*, 1987, p.26.

invitation offered to them. Thus, ironically the first Missionary station set up in Northeast was for the purpose of evangelizing China, and the mission was conspicuously named as “Shan Mission”.

The first American Baptist Mission station in Northeast was not for the purpose of evangelizing the people of that area, but as a strategic outpost in a campaign to evangelize the Shan tribes of northern, but as a strategic outpost in a campaign to evangelize the Shan tribes of Northern Burma, and Southern China. For five year the missionaries working in Assam was identified as workers in the Shan Mission.³⁸

Thus, with the zeal to establish contact with the Shans, the American Baptist Missionaries arrived Sadiya, Assam, in 1845; they received assistance from various quarters, mostly from the colonial officers stationed there. To their dismay they found out that the Shan language they had mastered in Burma was different from the Shan language spoken by the Shans of Assam. Therefore, they were compelled to learn a different Shan language again. As their work progressed they realized that their mission in the plains of Assam was not progressing and the Shans unfriendly. Their attention drew towards the Nagas who inhabited the mountainous parts far from the plains.

Rev Miles Bronson, an ABM Missionary, was considered as the first Christian missionary who came into contact with the Nagas.³⁹ The Nagas with whom Bronson made contact were ambiguously known as Namsang Nagas⁴⁰, whom he find very friendly and easy to communicate as they follow Assamese. Subsequently, he went to Namsang village with the intention of learning their language and setting up schools. In a typical naga custom, the village council

³⁸ F S Downs, *The Mighty works of God*, CLC, Guwahati, p.16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.21

⁴⁰ Among the Naga there is no tribe by this name, however it is claimed that Namsang Nagas were actually part of the Konyak Nagas, who has substantial presence in Arunachal Pradesh.

after much deliberation over the matter allowed Bronson to stay in their village and carry out his works. However, the villagers were suspicious of Bronson as being an agent of Company, and they find it difficult to understand why he came all the way to “*give them books and teach them religion*”.⁴¹ With the help of the village Chief and his son, Bronson was able to reduce Namsang language into book form, and succeeded in establishing one school in the village. Unfortunately, at the time when mission work was looking optimistic and the attitude of the Namsang Nagas encouraging; they were compelled to leave the work because of deteriorating law and order situation in the plains of Assam, and certain unexpected tragedy within the mission. The ‘Shan Mission’ was called off without any success and the first missionary work among the Nagas ended without making any converts and establishing any church. Significantly, however, they realized the potentiality for mission work among the Nagas.

It was in the year 1840 that the ‘Shan Mission’ was abandoned, which included mission work among the Namsang Nagas. After forty years, another missionary with great zeal took up the work among the Nagas that had been stopped abruptly because of various circumstances. E. W. Clark, who was an ordained pastor, arrived as a missionary for Assam, and reached Sibsagar, an American Baptist Mission Station in Assam, on 30th March 1869.⁴² He expressed his determination to ‘batter against the heathen rock’ and to ‘press home to the poor deluded natives the truths of Christianity’.⁴³ He has been described as a man of great dedication. At one point of time, when home Board disfavored the mission work with the tribals, he was ready to the point of cutting ties with them in order to carry out mission work among the Nagas. In this venture, he was assisted by Godhula Brown, an Assamese Christian, and by his wife Mrs. Clark. In fact, it was Godhula who has been considered as a

⁴¹ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p.22

⁴² P Puthenpural, *History of Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p.56

⁴³ Ibid. , p. 56

pioneer in Naga mission; he was the first one to venture to an Ao village, Dekahaimong, and told the people that he has '*brought a new religion*'.⁴⁴ However, the Ao Nagas were unimpressed, they said: 'what do we want of this man's religion?' When in captivity, Godhula was able to communicate with the people, through his songs and stories about Jesus. In his initial and short interactions with the villagers of Ao, he was able to bring a 'different environment' and 'new perspective' to the people who were living on the verge of famine, pestilence, and inter-village wars. The initial barriers were broken and impressions were made on the people's mind. Subsequently he made regular visits to Dekahaimong village, and return to stay there for six months. During this time he was able to convert nine persons, who were all baptized in Sibsagar on December 1872, and the new converts open a branch church in Sibsagar; this was considered as the first Church established among the Nagas.⁴⁵ Finally, Clark went to Dekahaimong village, and take up residence there on March 1876. However, he soon found out that it was difficult to maintained Christian discipline, and there were constant raids from neighboring villages, and the same village, in which the coverts were also compelled to participate, conducted raids. And, their reluctance to do so as well as refusal to participate in the village festivals that involves drinking made them increasingly unpopular and objects of persecution. Clark finally decide that the Christians should establish a new village where 'the spirit of Christianity rather that of war should reign'.⁴⁶ Thus, the Christians moved out of Dekahaimong to establish a new village, which came to be known as 'Hamlung'. This was undoubtedly the first Naga village established purely on the basis of religion – solely by the Christians. Setting up of a different or a separate new village though quite a normal feature among some of the Naga tribes, was repeated many times whenever there was conversion to Christianity. In the history of Christianity

⁴⁴ Milton S Sangma, *History of Baptist Missionaries in NE India*, p. 222

⁴⁵ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p. 65

⁴⁶ Ibid. , p. 66.

among the Nagas, conflicts between the non-converts and converts over observations of certain 'gennas' have been the contentious issue and the main cause of conflict. Thus, hostility towards the newly converted Christians was not just an opposition to the religion; it was much more than that.

Meanwhile, the 'new village' instantaneously increased in size and numbers, a school and a church was established. The 'new village' began to impress all neighboring villages by declaring peace and starting a different and new way of life. The mission work among the Ao areas began to spread from village to village. A mission station was set up at Impur, an Ao village, to gather to the needs of the emerging ministry, and it remains as a nerve center for a long time to come. This was preceded by the arrival of new missionaries sent as re-enforcement for the Ao mission; they were Rev and Mrs. Perrine and Rev and Mrs. Haggard, which arrived in the year 1893.⁴⁷ And, Impur became the launching pad while Christianity spreads like wildfire to the entire Naga tribes.

A task considered as most difficult was among the Angami Nagas, who dwells in and around Kohima. At the request of E. W. Clark to the Home Board, C D King was appointed as missionaries to the Angami Nagas. C D King described the Angamis as 'independent, enterprising, and warlike'. As the Angamis were making a formidable resistance against the British occupations of their country, the mission work did not go smoothly. It has been remarked that Angamis didn't show any inclinations towards accepting the new religion. So, unlike the Ao mission, missionary work among the Angamis was slow and poses big challenge for the workers. Despite, various attempts and major sacrifices, King was unable to succeed much in convincing the warring Angamis, he left without making much headway in 1887. Immediately, Rev

⁴⁷ Milton S Sangma, *History of Christianity in the Northeast India*,

Rivenburg was appointed for Angami mission. Initially, Rivenburg faced much difficulty like his predecessor, however by 1906, when he went back home for a short while, the numbers of Angami converts had increased considerably. It was the concerted efforts of various people; including the relentless early Angami converts, that actually make the break-through among the Angamis. The minds of the warring Angamis began to bend slowly as the shadow of Christianity conquers mountain after mountain and village after village.

The missionary work among the nagas was carried out in a dispersed manner; however, once a Mission station was set-up or an area or a particular tribe was chosen as a target, concerted efforts were made to accomplish the mission. Once the missionaries had succeeded in establishing Christianity, they moved on to other tribes who have not received the gospel, thus their attention moved from one tribe to another.

The Lothas were one of the major tribe that came under the purview of the Missionaries, after the successful conversion of Aos and Angamis. Similar to the Angamis, they were warlike and offered stiff opposition to anyone entering or interfering with their internal affairs. Though, Rev Rivenburg had contemplated about the Lothas there was no missionary available to carry out the task, and the situation was quite unfavorable. Co-incidentally in 1885, Rev Rivenburg got a favor from the British Government, and also he found a missionary, W. E. Witter, willing to work among the Lothas.⁴⁸ Immediately, Witter open up a school in Wokha: following Assamese medium. Inexplicably, the Lothas were highly attracted by the sweet music. Witter reports that,

⁴⁸ Downs, *The Mighty works of God*, p. 69.

The Assamese hymns are keenly enjoyed...The Nagas are very fond of music and have said that they could not restrain the tears on simply hearing gospel hymn, the words which they could not understand.⁴⁹

The Nagas were unquestionably very fond of songs and music, it is evident from the way they conduct ceremonies and festivities. However, the likeness for Christian hymnal was un-anticipated and it seems to have surprised the missionaries as well. Even though, all those hymns, and preaching were well received by the people, there was no actual conversion or acceptance of Christianity. And, the first Lotha converts were the students at Impur Mission. In 1887, Mr. Witter left without much success. After a gap of ten years, in 1897, Mr. Haggard and his wife arrived Wokha to take up the abandoned Lotha Mission. Unfortunately, after Mr. Witter the Lothas did not had any permanent missionary, and the mission work was not making any headway. In 1920, another school was open up at Farkuting, a Lotha village, and in the following year 149 Lothas were Baptised. Instantaneously, the number of converts increased manifold, and by 1923 churches were established in twelve villages (Sangma: 254). In the same year, an Association of Lotha churches were formed. Thus, Christianity took shape among the Lothas; once the people accepted it, there was an unabated increased of believers.

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Among the various Naga tribes, Christianity seem to have spread un-uniformly, catching up one tribe after another at different point of time; however, it appears that this was not actual plans of the missionary, rather it was the political situation and unavailability of workers that might have prompted them to go one tribe after another. Variation in experiencing Christianity has also been highlighted by Richard M Eaton. Among the Nagas, the Samas, Chakeshang and other bordering tribes received Christianity later

⁴⁹ Ibid.,

than others. The Chakeshangs received their first missionary in 1895, when Rev Rivenburg along with two Angami evangelists came to preach them (Sangma: 251). It was the young students who went to attend schools at Impur, that were the first Lothas to embraced Christianity. By 1930, three churches were established among the Lothas, and Christianity began to spread from village to village.

Unexpectedly, though the Semas were a major tribe and dwells closed to the Assam border, they were late in receiving the Gospels. Even though the plans for carrying out mission work among the Semas had been envisaged much earlier, the first missionary appointed for Semas came very late. However, Rev. Dickson, the missionaries for Semas, never went to stay in Sema region, rather he was stationed in Kohima, as many Sema students were then studying in the mission school. The missionary works among the Semas appears to be less vigorous in comparisons to other tribes. In 1917, another missionary was appointed for the work in Sema. Rev. Tanquist, a Missionary who was stationed at Impur Mission, made venture into Sema region, where he halted briefly at the largest Sema village, and he was able to convert an old Sema who had attended Kohima School. Rev. Tanquish was able to establish a church there. Later on, an Association of Sema Christians was held in that village, which eventually inspired the surrounding villages. From there, the religious movement in Semas gains momentum, and Christianity began to grow uninterruptedly.

In Naga Hills, the bordering areas were officially known as “Un-administered Area”, or “Excluded Area”⁵⁰, and the Naga tribes that inhabited

⁵⁰ Officially, this area was not within the purview of the colonial administration, so it had been denoted as “Excluded” and “un-administered” because of the obvious reason that they considered it as unworthy for their benefits as this areas remain far.

this region were comparatively lesser in number, except the Konyaks⁵¹. Notably, the Naga tribes that dwell in the “Excluded Area” were Sangtam, Konyak, Chang, Phom, and various others. As there was much difficulty in transport and communication and various other factors the tribes that dwells in this regions were late in receiving Missionaries. Among them, the Sangtams received their first Christian missionary in 1927, but the growth of Christianity was slow as there was much opposition. However, their close proximity with the Aos had accentuated the number people accepting Christianity. As it was among the Sangtams and many other tribes that received Christianity later than others, the Aos had played a crucial role in planting the seed of Christianity. The Aos being the first tribe among the Nagas, which had fully accepted Christianity, took upon the responsibility of reaching out to other tribes as their divine duty, and gave enormous emphasis to accomplish this mission. Their selfless dedication and sacrifice have been highly laudable, as Downs concisely puts,

Ao Christians traveled everywhere through Eastern Nagaland preaching. Some were in the employ of the Mission or Church, but others went quite voluntarily. They demonstrated – as Garos had done before – that the most effective evangelism is that done by the people of the Land. The sense of tribal unity and discipline of the Aos as a people contributed greatly to the strength of their Association and enabled them both to plan and maintain profits beyond the borders of their own area.⁵²

In the latter part of the Mission period, the enthusiasm and spirit of willingness among the early converts to work and encourage others gave the needing impetus towards the growth of Christianity among the Sangtams. Thus,

⁵¹ Among the Nagas, the Konyaks have the highest number of population, and many of them are also living in Burma.

⁵² F S Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p. 114.

the success of Christianity among the Sangtams came from various sources. It was a concerted effort of various people.

Unlike the Sangtams, the Konyak tribes had a long history of association with the Christian missionaries. In fact, the Konyaks were the first tribe to have come into contact with the Missionaries, when Miles Bronson visited Namsang village in 1838 (Sangma: 267). However, Bronsons' attempt to evangelize Konyaks ends up without much success: ironically, it was not because of the unwillingness of the Konyaks, but because of various other factors. Rev. E. W. Clark made another attempt in 1876, when he ventured into Konyak region with few workers. However, while on their journey the warring Konyaks attacked them, so they retreated without moving any further. Finally, in the third attempt, the Ao missionaries went to preach them. And, again, the handful of Konyak students who had studied at Impur station significantly helps the efforts to spread Christianity. The progress of Christianity at the beginning, as it had happened among all the Naga tribes, turns out to be extremely slow. However, by 1950 the number of Konyak Christian rose to 1600 members. Finally, the appointment of Rev. Longri Ao for the Konyak mission was considered as landmark, as he had played a pivotal role in the growth of Christianity. His selfless work has been considered as one of the significant contribution to the Konyaks.

The missionary work of the Aos did not stop here, it moves further to the bordering and interior of the Naga tribes such as Changs and Phoms. Rev. Kujingliba Ao, who had been assigned the task of preaching Christianity in this region, had played a major role in the spread of Christianity among the Nagas in the "Excluded Area"

There were two waves of missionary works that entered Naga society. The first wave, as discussed, came through the works of American Baptist Missionary Society stationed at Assam. The Arthington Aborigine Mission⁵³ based in England sponsored the second wave of missionary work among the Nagas; they sent William Pettigrew to the Bengal region. However, with the passage of time, the two mission converged when Arthington Mission declined to continue the support given to William Pettigrew, the American Baptist Mission inducted Pettigrew as one of its missionary.

Under the sponsorship of Arthington Aborigine Mission, William Pettigrew, an English Missionary, arrived in Bengal in 1890. While in Bengal, he learnt various languages, it is said that he took interest on the Meitheis, whom he met in Cachar, Assam. In 1894, he applied for permission to enter Manipur, however the British authorities were adverse to the idea of allowing any missionary work,⁵⁴ as they feared that this might antagonize the orthodox Hindu Manipuris. Pettigrew was able to get the favor of Acting Political Agent, and he was invited to establish a school at Imphal, Manipur. Pettigrew arrived in Imphal on February 1894, and immediately start his school; he began to write Manipuri Primer and Grammar. After six months of work, when Major Maxwell, the Political Agent in Manipur, came back, Pettigrew was asked to stop the work completely and leave the valley. However, he was given an option to work in the hill areas where various Nagas and Kuki tribes inhabit. After making a brief survey of the Hill areas adjoining the Imphal valley, Pettigrew choose Ukhrul, a Tangkhul Naga village, as his mission field. This time the British authority was more co-operatives, they allotted piece of land, and Maxwell instructed the Chief of Hundung, to send students to his school.

⁵³ Not much is known about Arthington Mission; however, it is said that it was a private society concerned with Robert Arthington of Leeds, England.

⁵⁴ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p.76

When everything was ready and Pettigrew was about to ignite his missionary work, the Arthington Mission declined to continue the support given to him. Therefore, Pettigrew was compelled to look for other sources, and sought the help of American Baptist Mission (ABM) stationed in Assam, which willingly inducted Pettigrew as one of its missionary. Thus, Pettigrew continue his work with the support of ABM.

The initial period of his stay in Ukhrul was spent on establishing buildings for residence and schools. The first thing he did was established School in 1897, with 20 boys as his students. He faced many problems in dealing with the students as they were 'undisciplined' and didn't have the tendency to concentrate on their studies for a long time.⁵⁵ As it had happen with many Naga tribes, the progress of Christianity was slow in the initial period. After five years of labor, in 1901, twelve of the boys attending the school accepted the teachings of Christ and were baptized. Subsequently, in the following year, a church was organized in Ukhrul, which has been considered as the first Baptist church in Manipur. However, serious troubles crops-up over the issue of participation in rituals and festivals of tribal religion, which were considered as mandatory for all the villagers. Pettigrew strongly resented the Christians from participation in such activities, and the newly established church was broken up into two. Though, only few remained with Pettigrew, his effort paid off as more and more people accept Christianity. Pettigrew and many of his converts carried the Gospel from one village to another, and soon there were many people who welcomed this 'new religion'. Thus, Christianity began to spread from village to village; however, there was much oppositions, conflicts, and those who accept this new religion were often forced to abandon their old village and established a 'separate' or 'new village'. This was a phenomenon that had happen with the first Naga village where Christianity had taken foothold. The

⁵⁵ Downs, *The Mighty Works Of God*, p. 80

unrelenting spirit of the newly converts and the continuing supports from Missionaries paid off as people were ready to accept Christianity despite the oppositions and discriminations that came from the village Chiefs. Once a new village was established, the numbers swelled unabatedly. The Tangkhul Bible was published in 1926, considered as the first book to be printed in Tangkhul. After 1927, the number of Christians began to grow rapidly.

Like the Aos, the Tangkhuls played a major role in spreading Christianity to neighboring tribes and other communities. In 1919, the Mission center was shifted to Kangpokpi, near Imphal; however, Ukhrul remain its Mission School, and continue to be a sub-station. It is said the Pettigrew was looking for a centrally location so that the Mission work can be carried out to other tribes as well. The Kukis were the second major tribe that embraced Christianity. It is recorded that after the end of Kuki Rebellion, which took place in 1917-19, Kukis began to relent and accept missionary work. Ngulo Thomson, a Kuki convert, had played a significant role in the establishment of first Kuki Baptist Church at Tazangvaichung. Rev. Crozier, another ABM missionary, had done pioneering work among the Kukis.

The Zeliangrongs, another major Naga tribe in Manipur, were the third tribe to receive Christian missionaries. The first Zeliangrong to convert Christianity was Narijinpou; Rev. U. M. Fox baptized him on 6th Dec 1914.⁵⁶ He became an active member of the Church and set up by Pettigrew at Keishamthong, Imphal. He resigned from the government job and decided to take up evangelistic work among his own community. However, he was not able to do much work because of the Kuki rebellion; but the conversation he had with Jinlarpou bear certain fruit as he was converted, and later on decided to take up missionary work. After getting baptism in 1930, Jinlarpou began to preach from village to

⁵⁶ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p. 175

village. He was able to convince ten families, due to stiff oppositions and discriminations from the non-Christians, they decided to establish a new village named as Sepang. Subsequently, it was converts like Namrijinpou and Jinlakpou who took up the task of preaching Christianity to in their community. Normally, they had followed the method of preaching in the open from village to village. However, among the Zelianrongs there emerged a *Khampai Cult*⁵⁷, which strongly opposes the move to Christianize their community. Downs described this movement as one of the strongest religious movement in the Northeast region that counter Christianity. However, as the Colonial authorities subjugated this cult movement soon after, Christianity began to grow. But still, today there are some Zelianrongs who have not accepted Christianity.

The Mao Naga tribe was one of the late recipients of Christianity. Though, as early as 1930 Pettigrew had successfully open-up schools at Mao village, Christian activity began only after 1923 when Tangkhuls visit the area.⁵⁸ The Mao students who had studied at Kohima Mission School were the first from Mao tribe to embrace Christianity, and subsequently they were instrumental in propagating Christianity among their community. In 1927, the students who had converted into Christianity formally organized a church.⁵⁹ As the movement grew, the prosecution against the Christian increased, and there were cases like torture, physical harassment, and driving out of the village. However, in the end, the patience and perseverance of the Christians succeeded, and they were able to face violence and impress others by their fearless spirit while enduring anticipated wrath. Thus Christianity began to grow unabatedly among the Mao Nagas.

⁵⁷ The *Khampai Cult* that comes into being as a form of religious and political movement grew out as a resistance movement to Colonial power, and they were strongly against Christianity, which they believed, has eroded Naga culture.

⁵⁸ F S Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p. 180.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

A significant development that emerged, after the successful Missionary work, was transformation 'from Mission to Church' and Associations. At the upper level, all the mission stations of various states were integrated into single organizations, and at the lower rung, associations were formed in the line of tribal affinities. The substantive changes of this transformation were that from a 'mission centric' organization it turns towards church-centric association. This transformation marks the culmination of Christianity in Northeast India.

Methods and Strategies of the Christian Missionaries

It becomes evident from the way missionaries had carried out their works diligently that they were well-trained men and women, ready to undertake various tasks. Most of them were expert linguist, Rev. William Pettigrew had received honor for the translation work and transformation of the tribal dialect into written form, using the Roman script. It has been described that the training of Christian missionaries were substantially influenced by the 'Moravian methods', by which men were trained in trades and useful arts for their work as missionaries; to build houses and make wheels, to be able to repair simple machinery.⁶⁰ These skills were considered as basic necessities at the early stages of missionary work, as the literary culture, which was often considered as the sole 'equipment'.

In Naga society where infrastructure was minimal, written language was absent, and a completely different culture and social life was practiced, it must have required a lot of skills, and not just linguistic abilities, to propagate and plant the seed of Gospel. Dunstan argues that the aim of Missionaries were

⁶⁰ Leslie Dunstan, *Protestantism*, p. 177.

'practical', its ambition was worldwide proclamation of the loving brotherhood as a religious experience.⁶¹ With such vision, the missionaries set out to communicate, imbibe, and present a new religion to natives in the foreign land. With enormous zeal they were able to present a new perspective towards life, and set an alternatives to the existing social condition. Often, the missionaries begin their campaign with an assault and confrontations with the religion that natives followed. E Stanley Jones, a well-known missionary in India, puts that,

There were three methods of approach then current: (i) The old method of attacking the weaknesses of other religion and then trying to establish your own on the ruins of the other, (ii) The method...which was to show how Christianity fulfill ancient faith, (iii) The method of starting up with a general subject of interest to all, and then ending up with a Christian message.⁶²

Stanley Jones, however, intuitively sensed error with this method, so he improvised the method by showing respect to other religious beliefs and values, and substituted the term "Christ" to Christianity. However, as one would easily discern, to a large extent "Christ" and Christianity are more or less the same thing. Again, the missionaries always take the stand of Christianity being a superior and true religion, whereas all other religious beliefs and 'gods' were decried as fallible, and it has been one of their chief strategies of presenting Christianity.

The convention that was followed, as Dunstan put, while attempting to gain recognition of the 'heathen' was that the missionary should be fully acquainted with the currents of thought which prevailed among them, with their habits, their propensities, their antipathies, and the mode in which they reasoned about

⁶¹ Ibid,

⁶² E Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1952, p.32.

god, sin, holiness, the way of salvation, and the future state.⁶³ Ideally, this paradigm of approach would have done much lesser harm and do little damage to the cultural practice of the newly converts. The pertinent question, however, is do missionaries followed all these paradigms while they were working out their in their mission field, in a foreign territory far away from home. Another important 'means' considered as crucial to the diffusion of Christianity was training of the 'native' preachers. The early native converts were usually given certain training, sometimes quite minimal, and they were instituted to take up missionary work. The employment of native missionaries were more convenient as they need lesser allowance, well acquainted with the local people, their values and lifestyles, and turn out to be essentially important where European missionaries were less. Also, they were enormously helpful while establishing native church; often they were employed as Pastors to look after the new church.

At the very outset, Christian Missionaries who ventured into Naga villages seem to have no concrete knowledge about Naga religion and culture. When they first came into contact with the Nagas, their sole effort was to get acquaintance with the people, then subsequently to get the permission to live among them and carry out their work; however, more often than not, missionaries were working even in the face of stiff resistance from the village Chiefs and Colonial authorities as well. Miles Bronson, the first missionary to come into contact with the Nagas, had succeeded in getting the favor of the Namsang Chief; Godhula Brown, an Assamese missionary, when went to Dekhahaimong, had won the favor and appreciations from the villagers, even if the *Tatars*⁶⁴ had refused to grant permission to him to carry out his desired work. While presenting their case before the village chiefs, both of them had

⁶³ Dunstan, *Protestantism*, p. 180

⁶⁴ The *Tatars* were village council of the Aos.

clearly stated their intentions of entering the dreaded Naga village – that of *bringing a new religion*. The Nagas were amazed to find that a person had come all the way to present a ‘new religion’. They rejected this as a plank, and suspected them of being an agent of the colonial authorities. And, why were they interested in religion? This question might have arisen in their mind. The missionaries therefore had to break this initial barrier, and win acceptance from the people by making their intentions clear. Once the people accepted them, the missionaries lived among them sharing each and every part of their life. Thus, unlike the colonial *Sahibs*, who were more of law enforcers, the missionaries had shared intimate relationship with the people.

One of the main problems that missionaries encountered was the difficulty of Naga languages, and the problem of communication. As Puthenpurakal puts, ‘it became more imperative, because in the whole structure of Baptist evangelization work both the spoken and written word played a major role’.⁶⁵ Therefore, the learning of local dialect was not only essential for communication and translation of the Bible, but also pivotal for the practice of Christianity in the future. Beginning from Miles Bronson, numerous foreign missionaries who had entered Naga society had tried to learn Naga languages and put them into written form by employing Roman script, which they say was far better than the Bengali script. Incidentally, the missionaries were pioneers in translation of Naga dialects. Rev. E. W. Clark, who worked with the Aos and settled there for almost four decades, had produced monumental works in translation of Ao language, writing about theological, Biblical translations, and grammatical books.⁶⁶ Rev. Clark was not the only one who had engaged with the understanding and translation of Naga dialects; Perrine had work with the Sema and Lothas, Rivenburg with the Angamis and Lothas, and where ever the

⁶⁵ P. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p.140.

⁶⁶ A. C. Sinha, *Christianity and Ethnic Identity Among the Nagas*, Mrinal Miri, ed. Continuity and Change among the Nagas, Shimla, 1993.

foreign missionaries were stationed they tried to put naga dialects into written form. Most of their published books were concerned with grammar, dictionary, and Bibles. Downs argued that Protestant lays much emphasis on creating language; and normally it was the first major work taken up by a missionary, whenever they enter new linguistic area. According to Downs, Protestants emphasis on local dialect as historically mother tongue was employed in both worship and reading of the Bible, and they want people to read the book by themselves, thus for educational purposes and spiritual growth local dialect was pervasively adopted.

Education was undoubtedly one of their chief mechanisms, which immensely contributed to the Missionaries attempts to spread Christianity among the people. Education, as Downs argued, was central to their evangelistic methods, and they were committed to education in mother tongue.⁶⁷ Thus, education goes hand in hand with literary works. Furthermore, the implicit notion that missionaries had was that through education “salvation could be achieved and the individual transformed through direct assault on their mind”⁶⁸. Education was therefore a barrier breaker, and it was basically aimed at transforming the mindset of the people. Besides this, education provides a means whereby Christian instructions, Biblical stories, and other forms of religious practice could be presented and imbibed directly to the native students as a part of over all learning process. Consequently, in most of the cases, the young students who attended Mission schools were the first people in their tribe to embraced Christianity. Rev. Clark had realized the importance of Christianity from the very beginning. Education was also employed as a medium through which access can be made for the newly established Church and a forum for enhancing evangelistic work among the Nagas. Puthenpurakal

⁶⁷ Downs, *History of Christianity In India, Vol-5, Part V, Northeast India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*. CHAI, Bangalore, 1992, p. 191.

⁶⁸ Ibid. , p. 197.

aptly puts that “all missionaries in some way or the other were ‘school men’ and did what they could to improve the station school and schools in the various villages.”⁶⁹ Establishment and maintenance of schools constitutes one of the important works of missionaries; wherever the missionaries’ set-up mission stations or find converts, schools were normally established.

The purpose that schools serve for the missionaries’ works appears to be numerous. It was an institute where tribal leaders, teachers, and native preachers could be trained in their own designs. Puthenpurakal puts ‘out of them [schools] came teachers, and preachers who formed the big array of *native evangelist* on whom depended to a large measure the success of evangelistic work in Naga Hills’.⁷⁰ Even though, there major emphasis was on literacy of the people, schools became a launching pad for various other forms of religious movements as well. At the initial period of learning process, missionaries had complained about that the young Naga students were ‘indiscipline’, un-attentive, and unable to sit patiently in the classroom for a long time. It is evident from this view that classroom environments were completely new to the Nagas, and learning in the Classroom would have mean much more than learning three R’s, rather it must have been embedded with the process of acculturation and de-culturalization. Therefore, the educational institutes were not just a place for acquiring knowledge.]

After getting an adequate knowledge of the language and social life of the people, the missionaries followed the simple method of preaching in the open areas in the villages, making their way from one village to another. In taking out missionary work, Rev. Clark’s priority had been “simple gospel preaching”

⁶⁹ Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p. 143.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.143.

and the administration of the ordinance of Baptism.⁷¹ It simply meant addressing a person, or groups of people and narrating them the story of Jesus Christ, and other Biblical stories. The preaching of Missionaries, according to Puthenpurakal, consists of simple announcement of the word of God. Which goes: "*Jehovah is the true God, He sent His Son, Jesus to save us. If we believe in Him, we shall have real happiness. All that Jesus did and taught are found in the New Testament. Every good thing is accomplished in the power of the spirit of Jesus.*"⁷² The missionaries had tried to send out a strong message to convince the people that the Christian God is the only true God; creating a distinctive dichotomy between Christianity and Naga religion. Then, the missionaries introduced the concepts that was hitherto unknown or absent in Naga religion such as "Saved", "salvation", "Heaven" and "Hell" etc. therefore, a whole new religious perspectives were brought, and they changed the worldview of the people.

While carrying out the missionary work, it is argued that Rev. Clark had followed a 'diffused' method by sending missionaries to various tribes and places at the same time, rather than focusing of single station or tribe. The native preachers played a significant role in disseminating the Gospel to different Naga tribes; as the foreign missionaries were few, Clark had envisaged this strategy. However, more often than not, the native missionaries followed the method that had been employed by the Whites. Though some of the Native missionaries were the product of Mission schools, and theological colleges, most of them were early converts with little or no formal training. They had been proved more useful as they were acquainted with life of the people and demand less payments. Indeed, they have made enormous contribution to the growth of Christianity in Naga society. Puthenpurakal defines 'native

⁷¹ Ibid. , p.70.

⁷² Ibid, p. 141.

evangelist' as *'all those men and women who under the direction of the missionary did some form or the other of preaching'*. As the way in which Christianity spreads in Naga society was un-uniformly and highly diffused, there was difficulty in pointing how the native missionaries were. And, there was a tendency among the converts to consider that whoever becomes a Christian becomes a part of the evangelical movement that was going on.

What the Nagas find most appealing was Christian hymns and music. The Nagas were lovers of dance and songs, which were intrinsic part of their cultural life, and religious ceremonies. It was through songs that Godhula Brown was able to impress the villagers of Dekahaimong; and the Witter's in Wokha found out that Lothas were emotionally drawn to their songs and music. The missionaries thus encourage singing and music, and it became a special feature of the Gospel teams, which visits village to village. However, missionaries fails to tap the beauty of folksong, as they discourage any converts singing old songs pertaining to their past social life, even if it had nothing against the new religion.

The magnetism of songs and music for the Nagas was rather a new discovery for the missionaries. Likewise, medical works were another means through which the Message of Christianity was indirectly spread. The power of these 'new medicine' that the missionaries brought effectively dispel all those traditional naga beliefs which considered sickness to be the cause of capturing of the soul by the malevolent deity or spirit. Consequently, belief in the powers of the spirit began to wane in the minds of the people, and sacrifices to them no longer a necessity. Thus, the employment of medical work indirectly or directly prepares the ground for the growth of Christianity. Puthenpurakal argues that the selfless medical services rendered by the missionaries helps them to project

as the figure of a 'compassionate missionary' who became acceptable to the people.⁷³

Apparently, the importance of 'medical services' was more crucial in the impact it had in the mind of the people than the messages of the missionaries preaching. F. S. Downs holds that the medical services rendered by the missionaries surpasses the compassionate value of the service.

The impact of medical mission particularly in the hill areas was always more than the positive influence of compassionate service in the tribal worldview religion and illnesses were inseparable. Illness was due to the displeasure of the spirits, curing illness was a religious function. The offended spirit had to be identified and propitiated by observance of taboos and the offering of sacrifices by the village priest. Not surprisingly the greatest resistance to modern medicine came from the priest. They correctly saw it as religious threat. When it gradually became obvious that the treatment offered by the missionaries was not only much cheaper than the traditional sacrifices but also more effective this was interpreted to mean that the religious powers of the missionaries doctors was greater than those of the priest.⁷⁴

Therefore, the medical services directly or indirectly devalue and desecrated the religious importance of the minor spirits. Coupled with the preaching of the missionaries, there was direct assault on the mind of the people pertaining to the importance and power of these spirits whom Nagas feared. However, dispelling the fearful images of these spirits was like a newfound freedom for the Nagas that gave much relief and freedom.

All of these methods employed by missionaries had varieties of purposes. However, concerted emphases were made in whatever they do,

⁷³ Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p. 144.

⁷⁴ F S Downs, *Christianity in India, Vol. V, Part 5*, CHAI, Christian Literature Center, Madras, 1976.

humanitarian services or educational establishment, to change the mind of the people, spread the Gospel, and debased the old religious systems. However, changes in religious systems had direct implications in the society; varied forms of social and cultural changes began to manifest in Naga society, which needs in-depth analysis.

Chapter Three

PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE NAGAS

Rain dripped through the holes in the roof, and the rooms once used as dormitories by the youths of the village stood empty and deserted. Like some huge antediluvian monster, the gigantic log-drum lay in the center, filling more than half of the building. Could its powerful voice ever resound again? The radiant crowd that dragged it into the village with the solemn songs and joyous cheering belongs to the past! Gone are the merry feasts, when young and old alike assembled in the morning round the great pots of sweet rice-beer. Gone are those days, perhaps never to return.¹

This highly emotional account about the social change that was occurring in Naga society comes from a renowned anthropologist, Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf. When he visited Naga Hills for the first time, he was disturbed by transformations in Naga society occurring rapidly without any regulations. In one of his acclaimed work, *The Naked Nagas*, he has vividly described the social change that was happening in Naga society, and the anticipated fear of tribal society being ravaged by the interventions from other culture and religions. If Furer-Haimendorf visits Naga Hills today, he will find that his anticipated fear has not only come true; but also the Nagas today has surpassed his imagination as well. True to what he had envisioned, those social processes were *irreversible*.

What were the causal factors or 'agents' of social change in Naga society? Undeniably, the Christian Missionaries were the first "Outsiders" to have intervened and meddle with the religious, and social life of the Nagas, and often fingers were pointed towards them whenever the issue of social change in Naga

¹ C. Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, Thacker & Spink, Calcutta, p.31. Probably, this description was about the Ao villages, which he has visited on his journey towards the Konyak Nagas.

society is taken up. Furer-Haimendorf holds that Nagas must have embraced Christianity because of the impressions created by its 'lofty ideas', 'curiosity' and 'convinced of its truth'. According to him, "The Naga convert adopting customs of the white man, often believed that by their observance he not only escaped a painful fate after death, but, ceasing to be a Naga, became nearer the admirer of the missionary."² Therefore, the process of religious change was simply not a transition from one faith to another; but rather it was intrinsically embedded with the process of acculturation. Whether acceptance of the Gospel was inspired by certain 'ulterior motives' or spiritual disposition, missionaries had always requires from their flock more than just a change of heart. Missionaries, whether Catholic or Protestant, demanded from their converts various outward signs of religious change.³ Apparently, whenever or wherever there was acceptance of Christianity, Missionaries had the tendency to enforce the converts to abandon and discontinue social and religious practices that were not according to their tastes and Christian beliefs. Thus, embracing Christianity would entail transformation and change in the social and cultural practices as well.

How do we comprehend the various work carried out by Christian missionaries? Rowena Robinson argues that 'Mission' was not a simple category; rather it was imbued with the notion of 'conquest', and infused with the ideas of 'reform' and 'civilization' of the natives (Robinson: 2003, 67). When we examined the lifestyles and behaviors that Missionaries expects, and imbibed on the converts, it becomes clear that it was not only the native's belief systems that they intend to transform, but also the whole society. According to Dunstan, "The 'purpose' of foreign missionaries is to be seen as Christianizing

² Furer-Haimnerdorf, *The Naked Nagas*, p. 56.

³ Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India*, New Delhi, Sage, p. 66.

of the 'civilization', culture, morals and manner of the whole nation."⁴ And various mechanisms like education, medical services, etc were employed to achieve this end. However, as Robinson argues, this process of social change brought by Christianity must not be seen as elimination of indigenous culture, but rather 'accommodation' and dialogue between two divergent religious beliefs systems. On the other, it is undeniable that Christian missionaries were the 'agents' that brought massive changes wherever they go. Pertinently, we should also make distinction, and consider the difference between the 'Messenger' and the 'Message'. And, the Colonial authorities were the other 'agents' who intervened pervasively with the social and political life of the tribes. Among the Nagas, the Colonial authorities had made an intensive effort to curtail the practice of head-hunting, and streamlined the process of centralized administrative system, which invariably had enormous social implications.

The missionaries were 'exogenous' forces of change that had intervened Naga society, along with the Colonial authorities. To the natives, the Christian missionaries came as a foreigner, more specifically 'outsider', and they had brought 'alien religion'.⁵ The process of social change that has happened in Naga society was, therefore, not through 'endogenous' forces. Before, the arrival of the colonialist, and missionaries' intervention, the Nagas were living in situation that can be approximately construed as 'isolation', with little change. The state of 'isolation' and 'difference' of the Nagas were successfully vitiated by the expansion of colonial authority, and missionaries' work. However, some have gone ahead and criticized that such intervention has brought the process of 'de-tribalization', and debased the patriotism of the tribals. Among the Nagas, the political upheaval that emerged right after the

⁴ Leslie Dunstan, *Protestantism*, p. 182.

⁵ Stephen Neil, *Christian Missions*, p. 516.

departure of the colonial powers have been construed as germination from religious affiliations and outcome of the instigation of foreign missionaries. Ever since the Naga movement began, the Government of India has looked upon the roles of Christian missionaries with suspicion. They have been accused of debasing the patriotism of the tribals, by preaching false ideas. Even anthropologist like Verier Elwin opined that Christianity de-stabilized the existing political structure. He argues that 'The effect of some of the foreign missionaries on the tribes of the eastern India has been to create a separatist mentality, both towards the India and among the people themselves...The political effect on the convert is to diminish his enthusiasm for India and its culture, the social effect is to isolate him from his non-Christian brethren in the village.'⁶ Undeniably, Christianity creates certain form of demarcation or segregation between the converts and non-converts, and the persons who had led the political movements were mainly from Christian converts. However, it is highly doubtful whether such political movements were guided by religious aspirations or affiliations. In northeast region, such kind of political movement was not exclusive to the 'Christianized' tribes. Roy Burman observes that 'From a structural analysis, it is immaterial whether agencies like foreign missionaries or the emergent middle class have been involved in the postures of defiance on the part of the small communities concerned. Even if the agencies were not there, more or less similar developments would have taken place.'⁷ Therefore, the movements that had taken place among the Nagas could have emerged independent of Missionaries teachings and ideologies as well.

Even before the Indian government had turn antagonistic towards the Missionary work, the anthropologist, and colonialist had been adverse to the missionaries' style of conversion and acculturation. However, unlike the

⁶ Verier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, Shillong, 1964, p. 219.

⁷ Cited by F S Downs, *History of Christianity in India*.

Indian government's contention, their discontentment lies with the loss of 'cultural values'. The issue of 'de-tribalization' was one of the contentious issues that have been raised by them. Though, many have lauded the humanitarian services rendered by Christian missionaries, the anthropologists have expressed their opposition towards the all out condemnation and elimination of certain social institutions of the tribals that has immense social significance, by the missionaries. For example, the *murung*, youth dormitory where unmarried youths stay, was one of the social institutions where all kinds of social activities took place, it was completely abandoned when Nagas embraced Christianity.

F S Downs, a historian, holds a different view in all of these issues. According to him 'what Christianity did was to save the process from becoming one of de-tribalization (broadly understood as losing sense of identity and respect). Christian tribals resent the charges that they have been de-tribalised simply because some external changes in their lives had taken place.'⁸ The arguments given by Downs seem rather defensive, and justifying the missionaries' work. The changes that have happened among the Christian tribes were not blind accusations, though it may not amount to 'de-tribalization'. However, unambiguously it entails a process of 'de-culturalisation'.

Furthermore, some scholars have argued that the religion of Christianity practiced by the tribals is not the same as it is practiced in the West. While analyzing the encounter between Christianity and Mizo culture, M Kipgen observes that Christianity practiced by Zo people was shaped by the Zo culture; hence the process of 'indigenisation' of Christianity.⁹ He argues that various Zo cultural practices have been comfortably incorporated along with the

⁸ Downs, *Essays on Christianity in Northeast India*, p.174

⁹ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The encounter between Christianity and Zo culture in Mizoram*, Aizawl, 1997.

Christian practices. Notable among them were: use of traditional drums while singing and revival ritual; composition of new Christian song in Zo language; and giving 'feast to God'.¹⁰ Invariably, the Christianity that tribals appropriated from their missionaries was unambiguously different from Christianity practiced elsewhere else in the West. Often, Christianity have been erroneously considered as a given and unchanging, and analogous wherever it is practiced. Among the Nagas, Horam argues that religious change was a shift from 'one set of taboos to another'. According to him, "To many casual converts change of faith mean nothing more than exchange of one set of taboos for another. For example, compulsory rest days [Genna days] were always observed by the nagas. Working on those days would mean offending their various gods and spirits."¹¹ Various Naga festivals pertaining to agricultural practices were incorporated into Christian practices, and given new meanings. Thus, ostensibly there was give and take policy. Therefore, Christianity practiced by the tribals was not an exact replica of the West, but more of 'indigenised' version. But, even this indigenisation process, which seemed idealistic, was determined by the 'values' and 'doctrines' of Christianity. Those practices that were considered as directly opposed to or conceived as slightly different from Christian life were insensitively discontinued.

When Nagas embraced Christianity, there emerged a clear-cut and distinctive demarcation between Christian lifestyle and non-Christian. It was reflected in social formations as well, there emerged structural demarcations and social segregation between the converts and non-converts. The religious differences between the 'saved' and 'heathen' were conspicuously made manifested in their social and cultural life. Of course, there were continuities as

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Horam, *Social change in Nagaland*, in S M Dubey, ed. *Northeast India: A sociological study*, Low Price publication, New Delhi, 1978.

well as discontinuities; however the perspectives towards life, and way of living changed completely.

In Africa and Asia, where Christianity was an alien religion and foreign missionaries introduced it, Stephen Neil argues that there had been tendency to reject the past and look upon it as 'evil'

Only in the rarest cases does the convert regard his former religion as a preparation for the new. The old world was a world of evil in which he was imprisoned, and from which he has been delivered by the power of Christ. The last thing, that he wishes is to turn back in any way to be associated with that which to him is evil though and through. And, after all, he is the only man who knows; he has lived in that world, and know better than anyone else its lights and shadows. If his reaction to that world is wholly negative, who has the right to condemn him?¹²

Therefore, among the natives who had embraced Christianity, there have been tendencies to demarcate and create dichotomies between the 'old' and 'new' world. And their attitudes towards the 'old' world, as Stephen Neil has aptly pointed out, have been rather antagonistic and 'negative'. However, it will be inappropriate to blame the natives for all of these changes in their attitudes towards themselves, and their old lives, as their mindset have been completely determined by the 'new religion'. As one easily perceived, they were caught in between two worlds, and the transition from one religion to another have never been smooth. There were various forms of social and psychological conflicts. As Furer-Haimendorf pointed out 'Christianity and Naga culture seem to him [Naga] opposite pole, and on the other side missionaries have made few attempts to bring harmony and build on that which

¹² Stephen Neil, *Christian Missions*, pp. 536-7.

was valuable in tribal life'.¹³ Among the Nagas the establishment of 'New village', and abandonment of the 'Old village' has been socially disruptive as well as significant. When the converts set out to live in the 'New village', their social and cultural life was invariably transformed, and it differed from their life in the 'Old village'. Whoever embraced Christianity takes all their belongings along with them and moved to the "new village" and leads a different life. Subsequently, one family after another moved to the 'new village', and in some instances, the whole village moved to the 'New village' leaving and altogether abandoning the 'Old village'. However, it was not a smooth transition; there was much conflict and confrontations, it was marked by violence and persecutions in the hands of the non-converts.

While analyzing the Christainization process among the tribals of Chotanagpur, K. N. Sahay has formulated theoretical model to comprehend the impacts of Christianity in a meaningful manner. According to him 'this theoretical model consist a set of five cultural processes, viz. Oscillation, Scrutinization, Combination, Indigenization, and Retroversion.'¹⁴ Briefly, Cultural Oscillation was characterized by 'nominal affiliations' to Christianity at the same time observing traditional 'Sarna' religion; Cultural Scrutinization was denoted by elimination of 'Sarna' elements that were incompatible with Christian beliefs; a mixture of Christianity and *Sarna* elements marked Cultural Combination; fourthly, Cultural Indigenisation implies deeper appreciation of Indian religions and traditional practices, and giving a Christian contents and meaning to tribal beliefs; fifthly, Cultural Retroversion happens when re-evaluation of eliminated *Sarna* elements were done and re-adopted after

¹³ Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, p. 55

¹⁴ K N Sahay, *A theoretical model for the study of Christianization process among the tribals of Chotanagpur*. Budhadeb Chaudhuri, ed. Tribal transformation in India, Vol. 5. (Religion, Rituals, and Festivals.)

modifications.¹⁵ Sahay argues that this process may not strictly happen in the same order as he has formulated. As we shall see, the process of Christianization that had happen among the Nagas has much semblance with what had happened among the other tribal groups in the other parts of India. However, ostensibly among the Nagas no major effort have been made to re-evaluate or incorporate those traditional cultural elements that have been eliminated or discontinued because the Missionaries opposed to those practices. Before we analyze the cultural changes let us examine the immediate impacts of Christianity, which was significant to the overall social changes in Naga society.

THE IMMEDIATE IMPACTS

In the beginning it was a handful of people who had tried to follow a different path from their co-villagers. And it was not easy for the Nagas to give up those age-old social and cultural practices that they have been following. The advent of Christianity was therefore a miniscule development; yet different in outlook, perspectives towards life, and embracing a totally 'new religion'. Ostensibly, even the early converts appears to be unaware and unsure about the waves of changes that were coming before them. However, one can easily discern the changes that were coming from the way early converts had started a new life, adopting a 'foreign' religion, and the reactions of the non-converts distinctively proves that it was altogether a new life and new world. The stunning acts of Christians, though few in numbers, began to pose a serious threat to the solidarity of the village, and the essence of Naga religion was challenged for the first time. Even in the beginning there was a significant

¹⁵ Ibid.

break-way, and discontinuities in the way Christian Nagas had led their life. There emerged a distinctive demarcation between the 'New village' and the 'Old village', and the way they lived began to differ substantively. When Rev. Clark set out to establish a 'new village', he proclaimed that 'the spirit of Christianity rather than that of war should reign'.¹⁶ The main reasons behind Clarks decision to establish a 'new village' were; the social situation where villagers were constantly engaged in attacking one another by conducting head-hunting raids; and the rituals and festivals that were incompatible with Christian beliefs and more crucially the participation of converts in all these traditional Naga social and religious activities. However, the people in the old village were unhappy over this move. One of the contentious issues was the fact that the 'required sacrifices to the Naga deities', which was normally done when a new village was established, had not been done, and they considered Christian prayers as an unsuitable substitute.¹⁷ Thus, discarding of old religious rituals and sacrifices became a common feature in the 'new village', and deviation from old customary practices became a norm that they comply. The neighboring villages did not take this lightly, they perceived it as a threat and challenge to their old ways; thus Clark and his followers were intimidated, and threats to kill all of them were openly made. Clark and his followers responded by openly proclaiming to all the neighboring villages that they will not conduct raids or wage war with any village, they stand for 'peace' and friendly relations with all of their neighbors. Their neighboring villages responded positively to this proclamation. As we can discern, Clark and his followers had already made significant changes. Substantives changes among them were change in 'religious practices' and 'social segregation'.

¹⁶ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, p.66.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Religious Change

Leaving the unsuccessful Assam mission behind, Rev. Clark looked upon the 'heathens' in the Naga Hills with great optimism, and full of enthusiasms. To the Home Board, he pleaded for the missionary work among the Nagas demanding that 'we want a man for the Nagas, upon whose mountain homes our eyes daily rest. They have some crude and indefinite conceptions of the great spirit, and evil one, further than this they have no religion. Our hearts go after them, our prayers ascend for them and a petition comes to you on their behalf.'¹⁸ Further, Rev. Clark described that 'Here for centuries Satan has had undisputed sway. The great masses of this hill population have never heard the first word about the way of escape from the thralldom of Satan.'¹⁹ Incidentally, this views about Naga religion had been described by Clark even before he had intimate relations with Nagas, and adequate knowledge about Naga religion. Thus, these notions were 'pre-conceived notions'; however, it was through this perspective that Christian missionaries had perceived Naga religion. And, it had served as guiding factors for the missionaries work among the Nagas. Explicitly, they had reduced Naga religion as 'spirit worship' and their gods as 'evil ones', usually translated as 'Satan'. Subsequently, these notions were imbibed in the mind of the Nagas, whosoever embraced Christianity. The foreign missionaries, like Clark, had perceived the 'hill tribes', like Nagas, as 'finest openings to foreign missions the world has ever known'.²⁰ To the missionaries, thus, the hill areas and tribals were the 'fields' that was unconquered, pristine, dark world, in which their task was to 'conquer', 'save' the people, and bring them into light. Ostensibly, their understanding of the Nagas and their religion was superficial and full of prejudices. Openly

¹⁸ Quoted by A C Sinha, *Christiaity and Ethnic Identity among the Nagas*.

¹⁹ Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.58

proclaiming that they were bringing 'new religion' foreign missionaries enters Naga Hills.

The labeling of all the deities that Nagas' looked upon fearfully and continuously propitiates as 'evil one', must be one of the instrumental religious strategies that missionaries had adopted. Presenting Christianity as the only true religion missionaries enters village after village. Presumably, Christianity was construed as the 'liberator' for the tribals from their 'social and spiritual demons'. When Nagas embraced Christianity, several contentious issue crops-up: the observation of 'gennas', performing rituals and sacrifices to appease all those 'spirits'. Often, denoting all of these 'deities' and 'spirits' as an evil spirit preceded preaching for discontinuing all of those practices that justifies their existence. J H Hutton has remarked that 'the missionaries in their blindness teach Angami convert to regard all *terhoma* – minor deities – as evil, and translating the generic *terhoma* into English or Assamese as 'Satan'.²¹ Subsequently, the missionaries resented and forbade any Naga converts from participating in those rituals that aims at propitiating those 'evil' spirits. Rev. Clark was compelled to move out of Dekahaimong, and established a new village, allegedly because the converts had taken part in those rituals and ceremonies that upholds Naga spirits. Eventually, in the new village, the elimination and discontinuation of old religious practices and ceremonies constitute the main feature of religious change. Christian rituals, like prayers, singing, and fellowships, accordingly substituted the rejected traditional rites and rituals. Though some have claimed that religious change among the Nagas was a switchover from 'one set of taboos to another', Downs argued that religious change was much more than that.

²¹ J H Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, OUP, 1968.

The function of rite and taboo observation of the old religion was at least to temporarily liberate people from the harmful activities of malevolent spirits. At least, initially, many became Christian because they were convinced that the new religion was more effective than the old in securing this objective. Belief in and fear of the spirits is still widespread among the tribal Christians. Many look upon the Christian no-work day (Sunday) in much the same way that they observed the old taboo days when it was inauspicious to leave the village or carry on normal work; others substituted the Bible for traditional charms they carry to ward off evil spirits while traveling. But, it was not simply a matter of substituting one set of taboos for another. At its best Christianity liberated the people from the worldview in which they were socially and psychologically enslaved by fear of spirits. Belief in the spirit continues, but it is no longer the dominant element it once held. Christ power is seen to be greater than that of the spirits. Another way of saying this is that theology replaced animism.²²

This religious transition or replacement was indeed phenomenal. As Downs has put, it was marked by continuities as well as discontinuities. A significant change that occurs among the converts and their belief systems pertains to their conception of the 'minor deities'. It was not that these deities were completely wiped away from their memory; but they were stripped off of their powers and the position they once held. Consequently, these minor deities were categorized as 'evil' spirits that cannot withstand the power of Christian God – *Jehovah*. Hence, to the converts the rituals and sacrifices accorded to these deities became more and more irrelevant in the 'new religion'. Which must have, indeed, brought much relief to the minds of the people.

Significantly, these conceptual changes of the minor spirits had substantive implications on the cosmological configurations – it led to the transfiguration of traditional cosmological scheme. The major impact was that the 'two tier' scheme of Naga cosmology was completely transformed. Similar

²² F S Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India*, Christian Literature Center, Madras, 1976, p.14.

forms of transfiguration had, however, happened among the African tribes when they embraced Christianity. Among the African natives, Robin Horton observes that where social situation was governed by close and strong relationships confined to a particular area, the 'basic' cosmology remains relevant and intact. However, when the social situation transforms and social relationships were no longer confined to a particular microcosm, the 'basic' cosmology was likely to be in a 'different form'.²³ He claimed, "*Less attention will be paid to the spirits, and more to the Supreme Being*". There appears to be much similarity in the way the structure of cosmological transfiguration had happened among the Nagas. Among the Nagas, devaluation and desacredization of the minor deities was accompanied by the introduction of Christianized concept of the Supreme Being. The Nagas already had pre-Christian concept of Supreme Being, who appears to be ambiguous and distant. Suddenly, when they realized that the 'minor deities' that surrounds them are not as powerful as they perceived to be, their attention was directed towards the Supreme Being. Questioning of the qualities of the 'supernatural beings' appears to be a typical feature when dialogue between two divergent religions takes place. Consequently, the acceptance of the new or other religion would invariably be accompanied by denouncing the 'gods' or 'spirits', and practices pertaining to old beliefs.²⁴ When foreign missionaries came to have adequate knowledge about Naga religion, they saw an immense opportunity in formulating Christian beliefs in the way Nagas' worshiped their deities. When Rev. Clark was translating the *Holy Bible* into Ao he had employed the generic term '*tsungrem*' for Christian concept of God, instead of employing any foreign terms. Traditionally, the Aos perceived *tsungrem* as a simple spirit in a relative term, often associated with specific place and qualities; otherwise it was a neutral concept with no attributes. According to Eaton, by using the generic

²³ Robin Horton, *On the Rationality of African Conversion – 1*, Africa, Vol-1, no. 3. 1975.

²⁴ See Susan Visvanathan, *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of the Abhisiktananda- A French Monk in India* Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998, pp. 25-27.

term '*tsungrem*' for 'GOD' the missionaries were in fact putting together what the pantheon shared in common – its spiritness, or *tsungremness* – and endowing that notion with all the power of majesty, transcendence, and universality of the Biblical supreme being.²⁵ The way of presenting Judaic monotheistic concept of Supreme Being in the medium of Naga pantheon, and as a Naga Deity was indeed a unique way of 'indigenising' Christianity. Among the Semas, *Alhou* – their term for Supreme Being – was employed while translating the Christian concept of God, and also among the Angamis their term for the Supreme Being, *Ukpenofu* was employed. However, confusion arose among the Angamis as their Supreme Being *Ukpenofu* was believed to be a 'female' Spirit. The Nagas reacted with surprise, when missionaries taught them that Christian God could do anything, and was greater than all Naga spirits and deities. Significantly, this form of translation, as Eaton argued, facilitates the process where Naga began to give increasing attention to the upper half of their two-tier cosmology.²⁶ It was recalled by the early converts that what struck them most was the infinite power and transcendence of God, that Clark taught them. The Nagas' acceptance of Christian God seems to have been facilitated by many factors, such as: (a) His ability to deliver man from fear of the malevolent spirits (b) His identification with new solutions to old problems in the area of physical affliction (c) His infinite power revered both timeless and unchallengeable by any other, enshrined in a written text.²⁷ There were, however, various other factors that directly or indirectly encourage the people to accept the Christianity, notable among them were; the introduction of Western Medicine, and control of head-haunting raids by the Colonial authorities. Along with re-interpretation of Naga cosmology, numerous Christian concepts were introduced in Naga society. Significantly,

²⁵ Richard Eaton, *Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas*, Indian Economic and Social History Review.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

the concept of “Heaven” and “Hell” aroused enormous curiosity among the Nagas, numerous questions pertaining to fate and life after death began to crop up in their minds. To the Nagas, their ‘Otherworld’ was a ‘ghostly production’ of ‘this’ world, and they lived in the same way as in the real life. To a large extent, their Otherworld was an undifferentiated world, which was similar to the present life. Interestingly, while Furer-Haimendorf was touring Naga Hills, he was asked by a curious Naga concerning about the fate of his dead wife. The Naga asked him,

“The Whitemen said Lukingjinba is an evil spirit, to whom we shall not pray, they say that all those who do not believe what they believe will be cast into the great fire. I had a wife – she was a good woman and gave me many children, never did she stop working; then she died ...Do you think Sahib that she too was thrown into the fire? Our fathers, who all sacrificed to Lukijinba, have they all been thrown into the fire?”²⁸

Apparently, these question were innocuous, but it shows that the mind of the Nagas have been greatly confused, and disturbed by the introduction of new concepts foreign to their thoughts. When they embraced Christianity, they were introduced to whole ‘new world’, which was completely different from their old life, and something they have never thought or imagined became a part of their world. In a similar vein, another curious Naga described,

‘There is death, we know, besides this, that after death our spirits went below the earth in a company with ghost, this we learnt from the mouth of our forefathers and so we know; that there is heaven we know, but that man could go to heaven, this, we don’t know.’²⁹

²⁸ Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, p. 62.

²⁹ Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, p. 71.

The Nagas already had vague and ambiguous notion of Otherworld, which had certain similarities with Christianity. However, after conversion to Christianity, their understanding of Otherworld was completely transformed. The distinctive demarcation between 'Heaven' and 'Hell' caught the attention and curiosity of the Nagas. And, their future state that has hitherto occupied less attention to the Nagas began to determine his thoughts and actions. Subsequently, their religious orientations were directed towards the unknown and imperceptible world – Heaven and Hell.

Naga religion, as described, had 'this-worldly' orientations, which was directed towards material gains, prosperity, good harvests, and immediate ends. The transformation in the Christian Nagas conception of the Otherworld, coupled by the devaluation of the 'minor deities', and discontinuation of all the sacrifices and rituals pertaining to the 'minor deities' changed the religious orientations of the Nagas. Suddenly, Heaven became the place that they aspire to go, and notions like 'salvation', Paradise etc began to divert their attention, and course of their actions. Protestant Christianity had made enormous emphasis on the importance of being 'saved', and becoming part of the God's Kingdom. The religious imaginations of the Nagas were intensively occupied by these questions. Thus, the sole religious aim of the Nagas was directed towards entering God's Kingdom.

Many scholars have observed that the Nagas' concept of sacred days (Genna Days) were similar to the Christian's observation of Sunday. However, as it has already been argued, the Nagas concept of Gennas differs substantively. The reasons behind the observation of sacred days seemed to vary, as Nagas observed such days due to un-auspiciousness, whereas for the Christian it was invariably the most auspicious day in a week. Again, the period of observations differs. The observations of Sundays and genna days was one of

the contentious issue between the converts and non-converts, when Christianity began to take roots in Naga society.

Again, the places that followers of traditional Naga religion considered as an abode of the deities were degraded by the early converts; by cutting down the trees, and contaminating the places, which causes much anger to the non-convert Nagas. Even Clark was reported to have set up a church in place where a ferocious deity was believed to be dwelling. Therefore, the notion of 'sacredness' began to differ between the converts and non-converts. However, among the convert Nagas, whenever there was conflict between the 'old' beliefs and 'new', more often than not, 'new' religion overrules the 'old'. With the total acceptance of Christianity, Nagas began to discard their age-old beliefs systems gradually.

Social Segregation

The religious change that happened in Naga society had several social implications. By nature, Naga society was a closely knitted society where the individual had little importance. T C Hodson has aptly described that Naga society was closely-knit, and there was no distinctive differentiation between religious practices and other social activities (Hodson: 1996, 124). Apparently, in tribal society, the religious and social realms are inextricably linked. Further, Downs described that: "In a tribal society distinction cannot be made between religion, social and political elements. If one is effected, all are effected."³⁰ Therefore, in tribal society, changes occurring in any institution of society are likely to have implications on other social institutions as well.

³⁰ Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India*, Christian Literature Center, Madras, 1976.

Among the Nagas, the immediate social implication that accompanied religious change was 'social segregation'. There emerged structural division of society into two separate social groups on the basis of religion. It was manifested in various forms, such as conflicts and confrontations between the converts and non-converts, and more distinctively it led to the establishment of 'new village' on the basis of faiths. Analyzing the social segregations that have been brought by Christianity, Verier Elwin describes that,

A doctrine far from typical of modern Christianity in most parts of the world, that draws the sharpest distinctions between the saved and the damned and that insist that Christians should keep themselves apart from the non-Christians, results in an essentially separatist, a xenophobic psychology, which has in many places manifested itself in social life and politics. In Manipur separate Christian hamlets have been established resulting in dispute and litigation of land. In return, the non-Christians sometimes insists on the Christians living separately in view of the fact that the latter refuse to observe the traditional taboos, at which others, believing that this brings bad luck to the village, are naturally resentful.³¹

The social segregation that occurs among the Nagas was not unprecedented, and it was a common feature that took place in most of the villages whenever or wherever few sections of the villagers embraced Christianity. Often, disputes arose over certain religious practices, such as observations of Gennas, which turn violent, and irreconcilable. Such differences and conflicts proved to be crucially destructives, as it ravaged and destabilize the social solidarity of the village. It was a social formation, and a rift that Nagas have not experienced; the reactions to these changes were full of resentments and hostilities.

³¹ Verier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, Shilong, 1964, p. 219.

As it happen, in most of the cases the students who went to Mission schools, and those who were inspired by the missionaries' preaching were the first ones to accept Christianity; usually the village Chief and his council members were the last one to relent. Often, the village Chiefs and Council members acts as the guardians of old religions and traditions, they were the forefront in persecutions and harassment of the Christian in the village, mainly because of their non-compliance to age-old traditions and customary laws. Eaton argues that "Given the exclusivist' attitude of the missionaries on the one hand, and the integration of Naga religion with the village, it is obvious that severe social tensions were generated wherever the missionaries or their school-trained village teachers preached."³² Further, after converting to Christianity, often Nagas refused to contribute their share towards the celebration of village celebrations of festivities. Why should they, converts agued, have to pay the village elders a rice-tax for the support of festivities in which they will not participate? For their parts, the non-converts would legitimately complain that converts non-participation in the fieldwork on Sunday added up to an annual lost of fifty two days of labor from the converted portion of its population.

From the beginning, when Christianity take roots in Naga society, Missionaries had made it sure that converts discontinued all those rituals and sacrifices pertaining to Naga religion. Those 'conditions' laid down by the missionaries proved to be contentious issues that create distinctive demarcation in Naga society. The non-compliance of converts and their rejection to observed those age old ceremonies had a lot of social implications, as these ceremonies were significant for the unity and solidarity of the village. The importance of rituals in social solidarity of the village have been well accounted. Rituals have been considered as unifying factor for the village community. M. N. Srinivas

³²Richard Eaton, *Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas*, The Indian Economic and Social History, 21, 1, 12984

has observed that among the Coorgs of South India the village rituals strengthens the unity and solidarity of the village by creating spatial demarcations between the village and the societies outside of it.

At the *tappaka* ritual the members or *nad* celebrating the festival of the local village deity undertakes to observe certain dietetic and other restrictions while the festival last. The villagers may not kill an animal or break a coconut for the table...no marriage maybe performed during the festival. If a person dies in the village he has to be buried quietly, without the customary giving of guns and bands... The restrictions serve to show that the village is the concerned entity in the festival. The restrictions increase as the concern increases – the village priest have to observe more restrictions than laymen. The village observing the festival is marked off from other villages by these restrictions. Every villager knows that failure by any one of them to observe the restrictions might result in some misfortune to the entire village. The unity of the village is projected to the 'mystical' plane and is supported by ritual sanctions.³³

Therefore, the unity and solidarity of the village largely depends enormously on the uniformity and compliance of all its members in observing such restrictions, and participations of village festivals, which are of import to the welfare of the village. Again, the compliancy was strengthened by the religious sanctions that were entangled with those festivals. Thus, non-compliance would invariably imply disobedience to village gods, and de-association from the social groups of the village. Explicitly, the non-compliance could lead to rift and divisions in the society. Among the Nagas, observation of Genna days and performing sacrifices for the crops and fertility of the soil, and seasonal festivals were the occasion where all the villagers come together. During such observations the spatial demarcations of one village to another was distinctively manifested. Besides, the Nagas were closely knitted society, so

³³ M N Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.220.

when the converts began to deviate from the old religious and social practices, it was considered as a serious threat to the very existence of the village. Therefore, non-converts reacted strongly when the early converts decided to abstain from observing all those practices. Often, non-converts were the first to raise objections, and gave all kinds of intimidations and threats. The village Chief, and his council members construed non-compliance of the converts to their age-old practices as a threat and a challenge to their authority. The history of Christianity was replete with violence, conflicts, and persecutions, of the early converts by the non-converts. When Christianity was accepted, among the Lothas, Christian missionaries were targeted, and the converts were persecuted.

When he had persuaded several other villagers to become Christians, Longwell came from Impur to formally organize a church. The difficulties this new church would have to face became clear at the time of its organization. While Longwell was in the village, it was learnt that there was plot to kill him both the missionaries and Christians. Longwell escaped during the night and the Government took action against the plotters but this did not protect the Christians from others forms of persecutions. There was trouble when Christians began to construct a church building in 1905. It had to be built outside the village, the villagers were afraid that the church bell – which the Christians evidently thought essential – would disturb the gods of the crops. Bad crop that year was all the proof needed.³⁴

Therefore, the closely-knit Naga society was disrupted, and rifts appears; villagers attack their own members, clansmen against another, which was quite uncommon. There were various misunderstanding between the converts and the non-converts, such as the 'church bell', different interpretations were given to those new usage. In the extreme cases, there were incidents where converts

³⁴ Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, pp. 126-7.

were actually killed by their own villagers. It had actually occurred among the Changs – one of the tribe that dwells in ‘Excluded Areas’.

The Changs resisted Christianity violently – how violently is evident in the story of a conversion of a young Chang warrior belonging to one of the more important villages, where as a result of preaching’s of Onen, he announced his intentions to become a Christian, and the villager became very angry. This man had been an exceptionally brave and successful warrior. In fact his exploits had made the village famous, and feared. If he became a Christian, the villagers would look foolish, and lost much of its importance. He was warned that if he did not change his mind about becoming a Christian he would be killed. Other Christians advised him to seek refuge in another village. He refused either to renounce Christ or run away from the village. Accordingly, he and his wife, another Christian, was put to death. Nevertheless, the villagers were greatly impressed by the religion that could produce such bravery.³⁵

How do we explain or comprehend the punitive actions of the non-converts toward the converts? Would it be justified to say that such actions were manifestation of ‘savagery’ and ‘warring’ nature of the Nagas? It must be noted that even though Nagas practiced head hunting, usually such actions were targeted against those people that were not part of his ‘in-groups’, but towards the ‘out-groups’ who were considered as his potential enemies. Customarily, killing of a co-villager or a member who belongs to same clan was considered as a serious offence that will call for severe punishment from the villagers. Thus, the punitive actions could not be considered as an act of savagery. The converts were on the verge of losing their membership in the society as they had embraced a new religion, and adopted a new life. Therefore, they were deviating from the norms of the society. If we take Durkheimian analogy, Naga society was characterized by ‘*mechanical solidarity*’, where the strength of social integration draws from solidarity of semblance. In such kind of social

³⁵ Ibid., p.137.

solidarity, any form of deviation was construed as an offence against the 'collective conscience'. Durkheim argues that in such social condition 'repressive laws' were employed to maintain social order. Therefore, the acts of violence and persecutions directed towards the converts were a form of 'repressive laws' aimed at maintaining the social solidarity intact.

Meanwhile, the attitudes of the Christian nagas and the missionaries have been altogether quite indifferent towards the non-converts. With the change in their religious beliefs, they began to view the non-converts with much resentment and ridicule their behavior. Often, the non-converts were considered as doomed for 'Hell'.

As a mark of conversion, the new converts were required to abandon many indigenous practices...the loyalty of the converts was directed towards their own groups, and the non-converted ones were regarded as sinners...a clear line of separation was drawn between the converts and pagans. What I like to point out is that the idea of groupness is germane to the type of teachings presented to the nagas.³⁶

Therefore, the social segregation that emerged in Naga society was not only because of oppositions from the non-converts, but also because of the converts attitudes towards the non-converts; they were reluctant to identify themselves with the non-converts so as to prove their distinctiveness as a Christian. Rather, the converts would form their own groups and remain within their fold. The social segregation was ostensibly not just a spatial demarcation, but also more of structural divisions, which was conspicuously manifested in the form of establishing new villages. Classical sociological theory of religion had laid much emphasis on the unifying factor of religion. However, here

³⁶ P Moasosang, *The Nagas searched for self identity*, Parmanand Das Gupta, *A Common Perspective for Northeast India*, 1967.

among the Nagas we find that religion has become a source of social divisions, segregation, and disintegration. Religion became a source of social division as conflicts arose pertaining to religious values and ideas, because no two religions are alike. As conversion from one religion to another took place the differences between the two religions become more evident.

However, this phenomenon of social segregation must be viewed as a transitional period in the process of Christianization. It occurs when Nagas were in the process of moving away from one religion to another – traditional religion to Christianity. Various forms of conflicts, disruptions of society, and confrontations marked this transitional period. It was not a smooth process. In the end, as the conversion process gained momentum, the ‘new village’ and the ‘old village’ were merged into one village again. However, in some cases, the two villages remain divided even after total conversion to Christianity. The social and cultural life of the Nagas changed substantially when they moved to the ‘new village’. These changes have been pervasive and extensive. It marks a significant ‘break- away’ from old life.

CULTURAL CHANGES

For the convert Nagas, life in the ‘new village’ eventually had to be different from the old village, in order to make his distinctions clearly from the non-converts. Often, the missionaries would demand that their inner conviction should be proved outwardly. The religious change, social segregations, and missionaries teachings has served as impetus to the appropriation of new lifestyle. Downs argued that Protestant missionaries presented Christianity as a way of life – new life style.

Nineteenth century evangelism placed emphasis upon Christianity as a way of life, a life style. Doctrine was important but meaningless if not associated with transformed life...Emphasis was made continually being placed upon the maintenance of certain standard of conduct if one wished to remain a member of the church. Whether the missionaries were always aware of it or not, the adoption of new life styles constitutes a fundamental challenge to the traditional culture.³⁷

It becomes inevitable, then whoever embraced Christianity had to conform to a certain standard of lifestyle to prove, and remain a part of the converts. The missionaries had the tendency to consider those who do not maintain different lifestyles as 'un-committed' and tried to make them straight by expelling from church memberships. It was a common measure that missionaries employed to regulate the lifestyles of the converts. These new lifestyles include discarding various codes of conducts and cultural practices pertaining to old lifestyle that were in direct conflict with Christianity, and also those practices that were unrelated and to religious beliefs were also not spared. While trying to Christianize the Nagas, the missionaries have often rejected all forms of social and cultural practices associated with traditional Naga society. Barpujari concisely puts that 'whatever the services rendered to the Nagas by the American Baptist, the earlier missionaries condemned Naga foods, festivals, dress, ornaments, religious beliefs, communal institutions and mode of living as primitive. They insisted on converts to teetotalism, he had to restrict to one wife and was discouraged to eat meat of *mithun*'s 'sacrificed' with appropriate invocations of the spirits'.³⁸ The Christian Nagas were refrained from participating in the Feast of Merit. The young convert Nagas were also prohibited from attending *morungs*, where unmarried boys and girls

³⁷ Downs, *History of Christianity in India, Vol. 5, Part V, Northeast India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, CHAI, Bangalore, 1992, pp. 146-7

³⁸ H K Barpujari, *Christianity and its Impact on the Nagas*, Mrinal Miri, *Tribes of Northeast India*, p. 180

intermingle. Christian hymns, western songs, and small tea parties replaced their traditional music, war songs and elaborate feasts. Elimination of cultural practices that were contradictory to Christian ideas and beliefs were one of the common features that occur during the process of Christianization. While elucidating the process of Cultural Scrutinization, K N Sahay puts that the elimination of various elements pertaining to traditional *sarna* religion was a common feature among the converts; it arose as no two religions are alike, and often contradictory. Among the Oraons, he observed that old cultural practices were abandoned as there were distinctions between the converts and non-converts, and social segregation among them, and acceptance of Christianity had given them certain sense of 'superiority'.³⁹ It is apparent that during the process of cultural scrutinization, the elimination comes from the converts as they themselves considered their old cultural practices as redundant and inferior to Christian practices. We see that similar kind of social processes; social segregation, negative attitude towards the past, had also happened among the Nagas. Coupled with the Missionaries teachings, and negative attitude towards the past, prepares the ground for adopting a new life style.

A conspicuous manifestation of this new life was also reflected in the way the converted Nagas maintained their households and surroundings. M Horam describes that:

The Nagas are not clean in their personal habits. Before the coming of the Missionaries to have a bath, e.g. among the certain Nagas was taboo; they could have wash only on certain days, preferably on festivals. This taboo was associated with the wealth, and they believed that by taking a bath, the fortunes and wealth would go away. There was no drainage; there was no latrine, and other sanitary

³⁹ K N Sahay, *A theoretical model for the study of Christianization process among the tribals of Chotanagpur*, Budhadeb Chaudhuri, ed. Tribal transformation in India, Vol. 5. (Religion, Rituals, and Festivals.)

arrangements...In the olden days, there were no separate places for cattle, pigs and fowls. All lived together in the same house. Boiled water was seldom used for drinking purpose as most of the people used rice-beer. All these unhygienic conditions very often gave birth to various diseases...to fight disease and to remove superstition, wherever the missionaries went they invariably opened a dispensary along with the schools.⁴⁰

Invariably, transforming the lifestyles of the Nagas would have been a formidable task for the missionaries. Through the eyes of a Westerner, the Naga household place would have been a 'horrible' place to live in. Unquestionably, it was the Christian missionaries who imbibe the convert Nagas the idea of cleanliness, and hygienic living. Incidentally, the Nagas were quick to pick up new hygienic living, and adorn themselves with western dresses. In the educated Naga house, the style and mode of living changed rapidly, with the appropriation of modern utilities⁴¹. Even in the remotest village, as Horam observes, Sunday was a special day with the youths dressing up impeccably in traditional and foreign garments, one could see men, women, children dressing in their best attires and hurrying up to Church to attend fellowships and Sunday schools.

Apparently, the missionaries had intended to make the 'Naked Nagas' more tolerable, and presentable to the world, by dressing them up. The question of 'dress' was indeed taken up in one of the Ao Association meeting,, which concludes that 'some costume, a little more cloth was recommended' (Downs: 1992, 165). The missionaries had usually encouraged the converts, man and women, to cover their bodies. Downs have reported about a missionary named Maid Lowain who spent much of the time sewing jackets for the otherwise

⁴⁰ Horam, *Northeast India: A Profile*, p.202

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.203. These changes were recent phenomena.

naked Mara children, so that they might be kept warm (Downs: 1992, 156). Subsequently, it inspired the grown ups as well.

However, the missionaries' way of dressing up the Nagas was not well received by the administrators, and the anthropologist. Their main contention was that 'indigenous' sartorial designs and values were not upgraded; rather they were given western dresses. Furer-Haimendorf had reacted sharply to the way convert Nagas have adopted Western dresses.

People with serious faces come out of the Chapel. There was the 'pastor' a skinny young man in khakhi shorts and a mauve coat. Some of his folks had also adopted shorts, but rest of the community were content with to emphasizing their allegiance to the new doctrine by wearing plain dark blue cloth, while women wear blouses, imputed from the plain, with the Naga skirts. The Aos most cherished and valued possessions, the pride of generations lay unheeded, and scatted in the jungle; ivory armlets, necklaces of boars tusk, cowrie shells, and headdresses and baldrics, and essentially some colored cloths, all discarded because they belong to the old times.⁴²

Extensively, Western dress came to be associated with the 'new lifestyle', and it certainly gave some sense of superiority because they were the dresses of their colonial master, and missionaries. Also, missionaries had insisted that converts should adopt Western dress to make distinction between them and the non-converts (Elwin: 1964, 122). Thus, dress became an indicator, an outward manifestation, associated with the new life style, and the new religion. No wonder, Nagas have become highly Westernized in dressing patterns.

A matter that was close to the heart of the Nagas was consumption of 'rice beer' – popularly known as *Zu*. To the Nagas, it was some sort of food

⁴² Furer-Haimendorf. *The Naked Nagas*. p. 51.

they consumed daily, and not necessarily an intoxicant. J H Hutton has remarked that only in the last instances an Angami would will take water, otherwise they will consume Zu which was considered as common drinks. But, ostensibly it was not so with the missionaries. At the initial stage, it must have been hard for the converts Nagas to give it up suddenly, the food that they cherish much. Unless one was really committed, it must have been difficult for the converts to give up this age-old food that was intrinsic to their lifestyle. For the converts, the abstentions from drinking *Zu* became a big challenge, and it constitutes an important component of new life style. Downs argues that opposition to intoxicants which includes opium and rice beer had its roots in the evangelical movement that emerged during the Industrial revolutions, which eschew alcoholism as they were considered as a form of urban problem (Downs: 1992, 147). Among the Nagas, and many other tribes, consumption of rice beer was essential linked with the festivals, ceremonies, rituals and common lifestyles. Therefore, it became a real test for the people who have claimed to be committed to Christ. Initially, it became a symbol and show of strength for their faith. Subsequently, it became it became an accepted norm of Christian life style.

Again, there were many scholars who had not viewed this enforcement of 'teetotalism' to the convert Nagas as a positive changed. Their contention was concerned with the nutritional values of this drink and its social implications. Horam argues that 'prohibition of drinking mild rice beer also has resulted in deteriorating health among the Christian, as it is the only only source of Vitamin for the poor man...it is good prohibiting a particular food of a race, but it is another providing a substitute. Unfortunately, the missionaries did not provide any substitute.'⁴³ Rice-beer had a lot of social significance for the Nagas. During any festival or religious ceremonies, enormous consumption of

⁴³ Horam, *Northeast India: A Profile*, p.293.

rice-beer was an important part of the social event, as the folks gather around the big earthen pots sipping sweet rice-beer to their hearts delight. In any get-together this was a common practice. When Furer-Haimendorf visits Naga Hills, he was invited to each and every home, and every family offered rice beer that he enters. Therefore, consumption of rice beer was intrinsic to Naga culture of sharing and caring. The prohibition of rice beer drinking had a lot of social implications for the vibrant social life of the Nagas. Without it, Nagas festivities would be a somber event.

For the Nagas festivities were essential components of their social and cultural life. Nagas' love for song and dance has been widely acknowledged by most of the westerner who had lived among the Nagas. Most of the Nagas' festivities pertain to agricultural cycle and religious beliefs, which invariably mean performing rites and ritual, offerings and sacrifices to deities and spirits. It became one of the main reasons for missionaries' oppositions towards the colorful and expensive festivals. In the initial period, the participation of converts in all of these festivals became a contentious issue. The missionaries had ostensibly perceived the songs and dance associated with Nagas festivities as a form of moral aberrations. And, the inextricable linkages between these festival and traditional religion were one of the main reasons that had compelled the missionaries to condemn these festivals. Downs elucidates the apathy of the missionaries towards the tribal festivals by emphasizing on the following reasons.

Because of the songs and dances were perceived to be either sexually suggestive (and it didn't always seem to suggest albeit seen to the early missionaries) or celebrations of war and head hunting they condemned. Because of their association with old religion, as well as extensive dancing and drinking involved (and it must be borne in mind that most of the early missionaries were opposed to

dancing and drinking that took place in their own culture), the missionaries and early converts were opposed to the observance of traditional festival.⁴⁴

Invariably, it seems that the missionaries and early converts had discarded most of the cultural and social practices that had certain connections with the traditional Naga religion, and old times in order to keep the Christian community away from all those practices considered as un-Christian and 'evil'. Along with the discontinuation of festival and ceremonies, another significant cultural practice that faced the axe was Naga folksongs and folkdances. As quoted above, the missionaries had looked upon these colorful practices with suspicion, and often construed it as associated with the 'sexual perversion' and propitiation of the evil spirit. The Naga converts had ostensibly complied with the missionaries teachings, as it had to do with their old life, thus incompatible and unsuitable with the 'new life' that they have chosen. The implication of this condemnation was that it ended up as a thing of the past. Lamenting about the invaluable loss of the cultural practices, Horam says that: "the missionaries have been the sole offender in suppressing Naga culture as it finds expression in their haunting songs and their energetic and colorful dances. Today, very few young men and women know how to dance their traditional dances or to sing their folksong which alone can throw adequate light on Naga mind, customs and character".⁴⁵ The traditional Naga folksong and other practices were often substituted by hymnal singing, revival rituals, and western songs, which were completely different from Naga style of singing and custom. In the educational institutions like schools, the missionary-teacher normally taught singing gospel songs, and hymnal. In the church, usually, the hymnal songs were sung. Thus, eventually, Christian hymns and western songs successfully replaced the Naga style of singing and dances. Unfortunately, no attempts were made to

⁴⁴ Downs, *Essays on the Christianity in Northeast India*, p.224.

⁴⁵ Horam, *Social Change in Nagaland*, in S M Dubey, ed. *Northeast India: A Sociological study*, p. 41.

incorporate Naga style of singing with the Christian hymns. Therefore, the processes of Christianization among the Nagas have been replete with cultural loss and discontinuities.

'Feasts of Merit' was another important festival that had faced the contempt of the missionaries and the early converts. Feast of merit according to Hutton was a 'status rite', which was determining factor for individual's status in the society. It was a form of 'conspicuous consumption' where numerous animals were killed and grand feast was given to whole villagers. However, the animals were killed as a form of sacrifice to the deities. Feast of Merit was socially significant as it fulfills the well being of the village. The missionaries presumably objects Feast of Merit because the animals were slaughtered not simply for consumption, but sacrificed with appropriate invocations to the deities. However, as Furer-Haimendorf have argued, Feast of Merit could have remodeled and incorporated into Christian practices. The abandonment of "Feast of Merit" had serious social implications as for the Nagas. 'Feast of Merit' was functioning as a mechanism to contain disparities in the society, and minimized the gap between the rich and the poor. With the discontinuation of the 'Feast of Merit', the social ties and bonds that connects between the rich and poor was debased. Therefore, the concept of being 'rich' also undergoes transformation.

A social institution of pivot that had faced the wrath of the Missionaries and converts was the *morung*. The institution of *morung* has been completely wiped away from Naga society, wherever Christianity find its foothold. The institution of *morung* was unique and had significant functions for Naga social life. *Morung* was basically a dormitory where un-married youths stay together in one house. It was 'social center' of the village, institute of learning where Naga youths learnt invaluable lessons of bravery and responsibility. The

missionaries, however, frowned on these institutions as being dens of vice where singing, drinking, dancing, and sexual perversions were the only pre-occupation. When asked why the bachelor's house was no longer used, a pastor retorts: "How could a Christian boy sleep those house of the heathen? To use them would be against our rules (Haimendorf: 1964, 51). Thus, these institutions were considered as contradictory to Christian rules. Therefore, these were abandoned without delay. The social implication of discontinuation of all these institutions was that the value of 'communitarianism' lost its importance in the society. The abandonment of Morung and Feast of Merit had massive impact on the Nagas vibrant social life, where social groups were always placed before the individuals. H K Barpujari argues that 'The disappearance and discontinuation of such important social and communal institutions were followed by the emergence of a spirit of 'new individualism', which was responsible for bringing cleavage between the converts and the animist.⁴⁶ Consequently, the growth of 'new individualism' accentuates the disregards for the family, clan ties, which was the base of naga society.

The void in the cultural space that was created by the elimination of all those institutions and cultural practices were filled up by the introduction of new institution such as schools, church and various societies and associations. To some extent, the Mission schools, where young Nagas were given formal education, took up the social function of the *Morungs*. What we need to differentiate is that the kind of education and teachings imparted in *morung* were not the same as it was in the schools. Most of the teachings in the Missions schools were based on the religious teachings, and literary skills, and very little about Nagas' way of life. The church was another institutions, which became the center for social activities and events. In the church the form of celebrations differs much from the Naga way of conducting festivals and

⁴⁶ H K Barpujari, *Christianity: Impact on the Nagas*, in Mrinal Miri, *The Tribes of Northeast India*.

ceremonies. Hymnal singing and solemn prayers replaced the singing and dancing styles of the Naga.

On the other hand, the establishment of schools and publication of books in Naga dialect gave way for the growth of literary culture among the Nagas. The skills of reading and writing become an added advantage for the educated Nagas. It changed the way people communicate, and though various kinds of literary work Naga dialect progressed. .

The process of social change among the nagas was characterized by acculturation and de-culturalisation. Various cultural practices pertaining to old times and religion were vehemently rejected and discontinued, which had massive impact on the cultural ideology of the Nagas. On the other, the convert Nagas, began to adopt cultural practices and new lifestyles that were brought by the missionaries. It will be erroneous to blame and the construe that missionaries had imposed all of these practices on the convert nagas, as in many instances the converts themselves had disdain their old life. And, certain process of Indigenization emerged, but to a large extent even those processes were determined by Christian ethos and beliefs.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The basic social divisions among the Nagas were not based on tribes, but village and clan affiances. The social structure of the nagas was pervasively determined by their cultural and religious practices. In the practice of head hunting, and observation of gennas, the solidarity of the village was strengthened, at the same time the village was spatially set apart from other

neighboring villages. Therefore, the cultural and religious practices that Nagas were following accentuate and strengthen the structural divisions.

The identity of the tribe, and affiliations with the tribes seems rather obscure and mythical—most of the tribe would narrates stories about their origin as coming out of the caves, or superhuman characters were given to their early ancestors. J P Mills have described that among the Lothas Nagas, the individual Lotha/kyong villages were essentially independent of each other, but notes that the Lothas, like the Angamis and Aos, have traditions about the common origin of the various clans of the tribe.⁴⁷ W C Smith have describe that it is difficult to determine what constitute Ao identity. He fins a lot of variation and no substantive unifying or common feature. The most important factor that Smith find was belief in the common origin.⁴⁸ Language has been considered as another factor that determines the tribal identities. But, in some tribes, where each village has a different dialect, linguistic diversities surpass cultural variations. It was not that then tribal identity was totally absent, but rather the oneness of the tribal was a mythical conception, as the dialects differs, and head hunting practices were carried out against one village with another. However, people claiming to be a part of one particular tribe believed in common origin.

The basic social division of the Nagas lies with village. And, apparently it had been crucially determined by the practice of head haunting practices. In a generalized formulation, Furer-Haimendorf has argued that ‘to a naga mankind appears to be as sharply divided between the small circle of his co-villagers and clansmen, from whom he is bound by a number of obligations, and the entire outward world consisting of the people of his own tribe living in the other

⁴⁷ J P Mills, *The Lotha Nagas*, pp. 96-97

⁴⁸ W C Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, p.54

villages as well as the people of neighboring tribes, who are his potential enemies and potential victims of head hunting.⁴⁹ The importance of village as a social unit is clearly evident from the given description. In the social microcosm of the Nagas, the village was where everything takes place and depended upon. It was not that the village was completely independent or cut off from the outside world, but certain common economic, and marital relationships had always been there. Rather, it was the nature of relationships between the villages that had served as mechanism for structural demarcations. Basically, the nature of relationship between the villages was marked by 'hostility' and 'vengeance' rather than cooperation and harmony. In such a social situation the village Chief and council members had immense power and authority, and their role were extents to the realms of religious affairs as well. According to R. R Shimray, "The village Chief had a dual function as the religious and secular head of the village. As the religious head, the village Chief is the first man to sow seeds, the first to plant and the first to harvest, he presided over all the religious festivals."⁵⁰ In all the matters, religious or secular, of the village the decision of the village Chief and Council members were final and binding.

Within the village, the social units of the Nagas were divided into various *Khels*⁵¹. In some of the Naga tribes, the *khels* lived in a well-demarcated place; they construct fortified walls to demarcate one *khel* from another. The conflicts between the *khels* were a common feature in the Naga village. However, when Christianity swept Naga Hills, the social structures were transformed, and the importance of *khel* perished in the face of Christianity. However, the *khel* as a social unit still survives in Naga society.

⁴⁹ Furer-Haimendorf, *Morality and Prestige Among the Nagas*, in M C Pradhan, ed. *Anthropology and Archeology: Essays in Honor of Verier Elwin*, OUP, New Delhi, 1968.

⁵⁰ R R Shimray, *Origin and Culture of the Nagas*, p. 33

⁵¹ The *Khels* are basically kinship groups that are believed to have common forefathers and bloodline. They are exogamous, and member is based on heredity.

“The social structure” according to Ramakrishna Mukherjee, “ changes according to the changes taking place within and across the collectiivities, i.e. according to the social process operating in society with respect to the individual it contains”.⁵² Therefore, the social processes occurring in society has the tendency to change the social structure. Among the Nagas, the cultural changes that came along with the religious change had a massive impact on the structural formations of the Naga society. The relationships that exist between the villages were completely transformed. Along with the successful control of head haunting, and close connections between the churches, the relationship between the villages were transformed into ‘cordial’ and ‘cooperative’. Christianity, with its message of love, had played a significant role in shedding enmities between the villages and changed the nature of relationship between the villages. The attitudes of villagers to the members of other villages, and outsiders changed abruptly. According to Downs:

Christianity has played a particularly significant role in providing a basis for new relationship among the villages and tribes that the British administration and the prohibition of head haunting necessitated. Warfare between neighboring villages and tribes had been a way of life. Fighting was a primary responsibility of the young man and this shape the social life of the village. The Christian emphasis on upon love for neighbor and enemy provided an ideological base for the new order.⁵³

Apart from bringing new ideological basis, Christian organizations had brought the people belonging to various villages together by organizing annual meetings and religious conferences. Those tribal associations and meetings, not only broke down the inter-village barriers, but also rise to a new higher-level

⁵² Ramakrishna Mukherjee, *Society, Structure, and Development*, Sage, New Delhi, 2002, p. 16

⁵³ Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India*, p. 18

forum of discussions on issues formerly decided in the village level. These changes not only diminish the conflict between the villages but also transform the structural configuration that demarcates the 'in' groups from the 'out' groups. It was these changes that had contributed enormously towards the reconstruction of and strengthening of the mythical concept of tribal identity.

In the village the establishment of church as an independent institution for religious affairs brought structural changes in the village life. The church became the center of various religious and social activities. And, the Pastor takes up the role of the village priest and religious functions of the Chief – performing all rite and rituals within the church and outside. Basically, it meant that end for the village priest and change of role for the village Chief. There were instances where conflicts occur between the Church and the village Council; over the matters concerning the authority to settle disputes in the village. With the increasing authority of the church, its role became pervasive. It became authority that solely defines morality and immorality of the behavior of its attendants.

In the new social order, as the old social relationships breakdowns, new forms of relationship emerged in the villages. The Semitization of religion increased, and there emerged a clear-cut demarcation between the head of the religion and the head of village; the religious realms were differentiated from other non-religious realms as well. The value of *khel* relationship was degraded. Therefore, new forms of social configurations take place in Naga society.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSION

As the Nagas embraced Christianity convincingly, significant changes in their belief systems inevitably followed. It was invariably not a simple transition from “one set of taboos to another”. Substantively, it was manifested in the way ‘cosmological transfigurations’ have occurred. The powers and qualities of the Supreme Being were venerated to greater level and more extensively; even for ‘minor’ or smaller problems, the Supreme Being was supplicated. On the contrary, the ‘lesser spirits’ were devaluated to the extent that not even a single ritual or sacrifice was accorded to them. It was not that the ‘lesser spirits’ have been completely wiped away from the memory of the people; however, it was the perception of the people towards these ‘spirits’ that have undergone transformation. These lesser spirits were degraded and categorized, and looked upon with ‘negative’ attitudes, through the perspectives of Christianity; thus, in the ‘new village’ their powers and functions become irrelevant. It can also be construed as cognitive transformations. However, the Nagas still continue to believe that these ‘evil’ spirits caused misfortunes and illness. The difference is that they no longer propitiate these ‘spirits’ for relief and deliverance, rather they pray and supplicate the Supreme Being, whose capacities surpass all other spirits and deities.

Even though, the concept and idea of Supreme Being became more distinct, clearer, and closer to them, certain doubts were evidently present. Confusion over the notion of Supreme Being are apparently visible, as this notion has been Christianized, whereas the old term that they employed for the Supreme Being in traditional Naga religion was still used by the Christian

Nagas. Some of the Naga tribes had taken long time to come to terms with the Christianized notion of Supreme Being, as their traditional notions varies with Christianity. Now, the pertinent question is how to comprehend the belief system of the Nagas. Taking the case Supreme Being, the belief system of the Nagas is not an exact replica of Christianity in the West; also it is in contradictory to traditional Naga belief system. Then, is it 'Indigenized' or Christianized'? Or is it a 'fusion' of the two?

As far as the religious rituals and practices are concerned, it appears that Nagas have fully incorporated Christian rituals. Also, despite the elimination of most of the rituals and practices pertaining to old religion, certain rituals and practices were retained and incorporated to Christian practices, after giving christianized 'meanings' and 'usage' to those old practices. Again, certain religious practices that were newly introduced were celebrated in Naga style, with lots feastings and long days of celebrations. Do these rites and rituals continue to serve the same purpose that traditional Naga festivals do? Is this a form of 'cultural combinations' that K. N. Sahay had formulated? Further, there were certain problems where traditional beliefs come into conflict with Christianity. Though, it was claimed and argued that Christian Nagas should not takes those old beliefs, such as omens and myths, seriously, they still seem to have certain reservations for those beliefs.

Evidently, religious change has proved to be more than just a change in the belief systems. That outward manifestations, construed as indicators, for the 'inner conviction' have proved to be pervasively crucial to the discontinuation of age-old cultural practices. To a large extent, Nagas have succeeded in overcoming the antagonistic relationships that arose due to 'social segregation'. However, are they still caught in between the two worlds – old and new? Often, the convert Nagas had looked upon the 'old life' with

contempt, and negative feelings, and they willingly accepted the 'new life', taking it as a form of liberation from the old shackles that bound them. Actually, the 'new life' that Nagas had chosen and, picked up from the Missionaries has separated them away from their own culture, which had enormous social implications. Take the case of 'rice beer' consumption. Despite all those Christian teachings, substantive numbers of Nagas still continue to consume rice beer. However, the variation is that their perceptions towards these drinks have changed completely because of Christianity. Significantly, among the younger generation, it has been considered as 'intoxicants'. So much is the social disdain for this 'drinks' that the drinkers are considered as 'social deviants' who have to be corrected, through punishment in some cases. Therefore, among the Nagas, the issue of 'cultural retention' and 'retroversion' appears to be ambiguous and full of complexities. Even though, Nagas have Westernized much of their cultural life, and advanced considerably in educational spheres, their perspective towards the 'old world' seems to be unchanged. Even if the Nagas take pride in their distinct identity, it is unlikely that they would realize the real value of Naga culture. Also, one would see significant changes between the first generation of Naga converts and the subsequent generations. It is unlikely that the new and younger generation would have the same understanding and perspectives towards the traditional Naga life. Variations in perspective and practice are likely to occur as the Naga society advanced.

Further, what needs to be interrogated is the control and authority of the Church over the cultural practices and lifestyle of the people. Do the Christian Nagas still have to conform to certain standards of lifestyle? For the early converts, certain conditions were laid down, so that distinctions can be made between the 'converts' and 'non-converts'. It is imperative that certain religious and social mechanism will be employed to regulate the social and

cultural life of the Christian Nagas. Pertaining to this, the role of the Church will be crucial, and a determining factor.

Along with the 'new lifestyles' that came into being, a 'new social order' was established when Nagas embraced Christianity wholeheartedly. This 'new social order' was heralded by the end of 'hostility' between the villages, which was manifested in the discontinuation of 'head hunting' practices. Actually, it was the *nature* of relationship between the villages that have undergone transformations; which accentuates the breakdown of social divisions that was in existent. However, the village as a social unit, and a structural division still remains. And again, the relationship between the villages, though transformed, appears to be fluctuating and not rigid. The nature of relationships between the villages oscillates between cooperation and conflict, and to neutrality. Significantly, the demarcations and divisions between the 'in' and 'out' group was breached.

In the village, it was the *khel* divisions that determined the relationships between the individuals and groups as well. And, the *khels* lives together in a certain specified place, there was spatial demarcations being made from one *khel* to another through the construction of fortified walls. It likely those certain functions; like settling disputes, or matter pertaining to marriages, would continue to be taken up *khel*. Whether all those spatial demarcations and fortified walls continue to exist or not in the Christian Naga villages is a matter that needs to be interrogated. Also, significant will be the role of *khel* in the 'new social order'.

The construction of 'tribal identity' pertaining to the 'image' and 'culture' of particular tribes seems to have gained momentum, as the hostile relationships between the villages disappear. Those 'mythical' and 'historical'

constructions of 'tribal unity' and 'common origin' have become more realistic, as new organizations came into being in the lines different tribal affinities. And, the attachment of the people appears to be moving away from 'village' to 'tribe' as their social relationships swells, and their world expands beyond the horizon.

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