

**CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG
THE AO NAGAS 1870-1955**



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "**Christianity and Social Change Among the Ao Nagas, 1870-1955**", " submitted by **Robinson Thoutang** in partial fulfilment of the requirements 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 is his original work.

We recommend that this work may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

The earliest mention of the Nagas is made in the "Buranjis", the history of the Ahom Kings of Assam of the thirteenth century. Nothing much has been said except that they are warlike people living in the north of Assam, inhabiting the inaccessible hills, also known as the Naga Hills. "...they are savages, village warring with village constantly cutting off heads of get skulls." This is how the Nagas were introduced to the missionaries by the Assamese.

In due course of time, Nagas, the headhunters and animists, with their distinct culture, custom and polity, underwent a drastic change as a result of contact with Christianity and British administration, the two primary agents of change. However it is held that the all important factor that caused change in the socio-cultural and religious life of the people is the spread of Christianity. The main focus of this study is to understand the role of Christianity in bringing about social change among the Nagas, specifically the Ao Nagas, from 1870-1955.

In the first chapter an assessment is made of the traditional Ao Naga socio-cultural history based on the following sources available. J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*; W.C.Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*; and S.N. Majumdar, *The Ao Nagas*. These monographs give us important information on the ancient Ao society, viz., family, village set-up, headhunting and the institution of Morung etc. They shall be studied along with works done by Naga scholars such as

Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture by Panger Imchen and *Ao Naga Social and Customary Genealogy* by L.Imti Aier.

The second chapter deals with the British occupation of the Naga Hills. It highlights the British policy towards the Nagas. It also seeks to examine the influence of British administration on Ao Naga socio-cultural life, through the introduction of modern system of administration. For the British occupation of Naga Hills, there is no dearth of source materials. However, due to the fact that Nagaland is a restricted area, files pertaining to Naga Hills district from 1915 to 1947 (which have not been transferred from External Affairs Ministry), are not available. Foreign Department files from 1832 to 1913, in the National Archives of India, have been consulted.

The third chapter traces the advent of Christianity, its growth and development among the Ao Nagas. It also studies the contribution of American Baptist missionaries in the field of education, medical work and literary translation.

The study on the working of the mission suffers from a scarcity of source materials. Unfortunately, first of all, the American Baptist Mission does not maintain any archive in India. Impur, the mission station centre, could have provided the necessary information, but the materials were reportedly lost in a fire in 1919.

The primary sources for this study are Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, 1893-1950, and the paper and discussion of the jubilee

conference, 1886, of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union, E.T.C. Archives, Jorhat. Pertaining to mission work in Nagaland, this study has depended much on the works of H.K.Barpujari and Joseph Puthenpurakal who have utilized the archives of the American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York, and the Baptist Internal Ministries, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

The fourth chapter deals with the impact of Christianity on the Ao Nagas. It seeks to find reasons for their tremendous response to Christianity, by studying the interaction between Christianity and traditional Ao Naga culture. It also seeks to analyse how through the creation of a common written language, spread of education and religion a new sense of tribal solidarity and identity was forged.

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(ROBINSON THOUTANG)

CHAPTER I

TRADITIONAL AO NAGA SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY

Nagaland is located in the extreme North-East region of India, with an area of 6.579 sq. km. The state is bordered by Assam in the West and North, by Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar in the East, by Manipur in the South, and runs more or less parallel to the left bank of Brahmaputra.¹ Nagaland is almost entirely inhabited by Nagas, consisting of 16 different tribes and some Kukis, Kaeharis, Garos, Bangalees, Assamese and Nepalese in the plain sector. Besides Nagaland Nagas are also found in the hills of Manipur, North of Arunachal Pradesh, parts of Cachar hill and on the western border of Burma. Although spread over there vast areas, under separate political administration, are living in a geographical contiguous areas.²

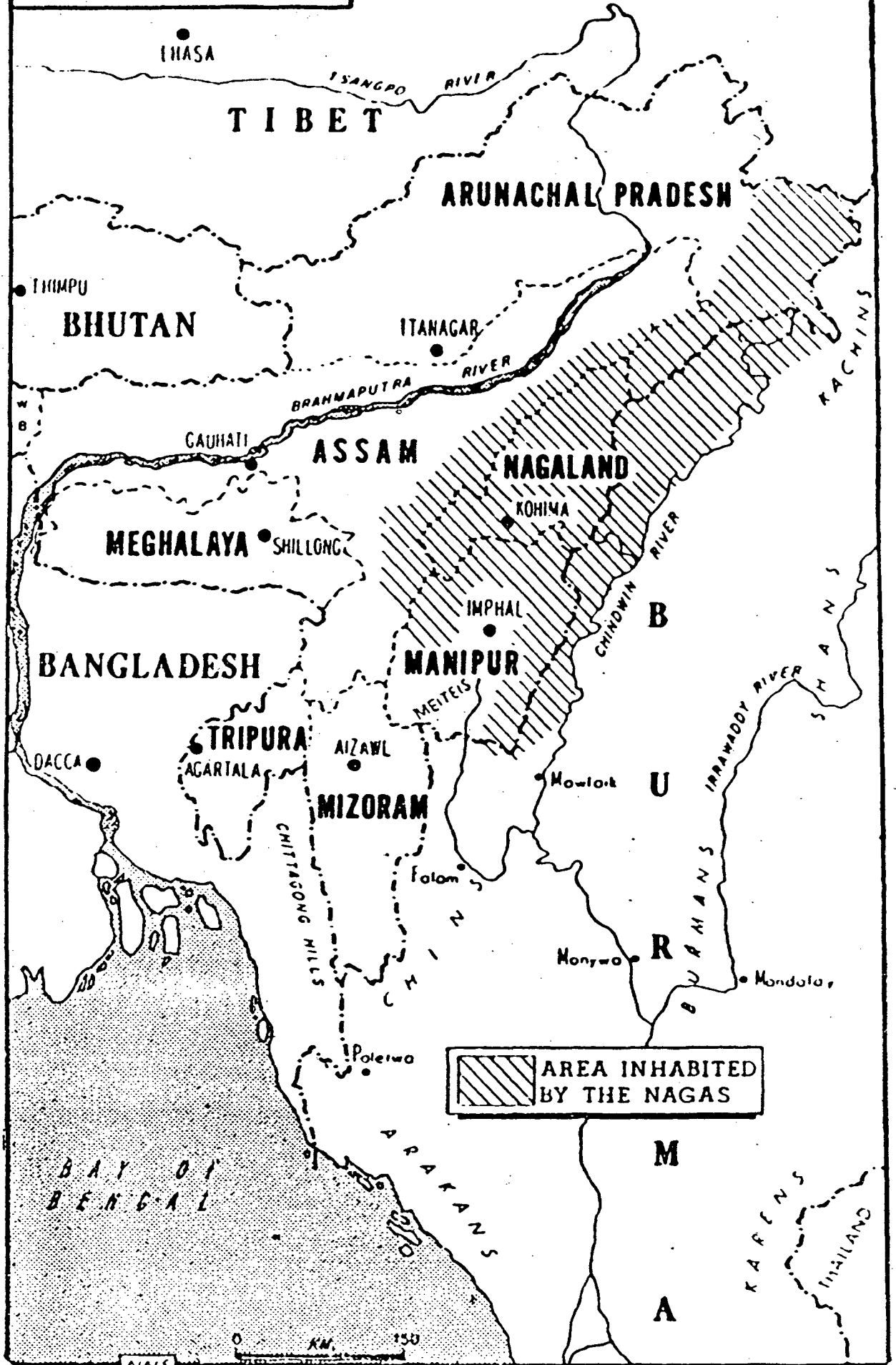
The 'Naga' antiquity is shrouded in obscurity due to the absence of conventional sources of history, such as archaeology, numismatics, foreign accounts, indigenous accounts and chronicles. So much is depended on the oral traditions of various tribes, its customs and habits, and the excellent tribal monographs, memoirs, and tour dairies of the colonial administrators and the American missionaries most of whom were established ethnographers, archaeologists and sociologists. Though the historiography which developed

1 *State Atlas of Nagaland 1991*, Kohima: Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Government of Nagaland, 1991, p.8.

2 *Mokokchung District Gazetteer: Nagaland 1979*, p.22.

NORTH-EAST INDIA

CHINA



in the later part of the nineteenth century suffered from inadequacy and imperfection, we could glean important information from these sources and contrast them along with the several works done by Naga scholars and make an appraisal of the ancient Ao Naga socio-cultural history. An attempt is made in this chapter to study the various postulations given by eminent social scientists on the origin of the term "Naga", their place of origin, date of migration and how they have come to their present place of settlement, Nagaland, then known as the Naga hills.

The Term "Naga"

Many theories have been put forward by historians, geographers, anthropologists and other scholars on the origin and meaning of the word *Naga* but no consensus has been possible till today. Hence it makes interesting to study the different views expressed by them as to how the name came to be used.

In the ancient Sanskrit literature references are made to the Kiratas, S.K.Chatterji and other scholars opined that 'Kiratas' is nothing but 'Indo-mongoloid'. If this is justified then *Naga* is likely to be a derivation from the Sanskrit word *Naga* (meaning serpent) or *Ng* (meaning hill/mountain). However a careful study of history proves that it is not likely to identify the

Nagas with the Kiratas of Sanskrit literature. Hulton³ has stated that the area now occupied by the Nagas was formerly, either wholly or partly, occupied by the people of Mon-Khmer affinities. J.P.Mills (1926) was of the opinion that *Naga* is a corruption of the Assamese *Naga* (pronounced *Noga*) probably meaning a mountain or inaccessible place.⁴ It is also hard to accept the theory of *Naga* originating from Sanskrit *Nag* meaning serpent, when there is no snake worship among the Naga tribes.⁵

Ptolemy (150 AD), the famous geographer of Egypt, in his ancient geography refers to a group of people known as *Nangalogar* with the Nagas. *Nangalogae* (*Nanga Log*) in Sanskrit means *nanga* (naked); *logae*, *log* (people).⁶

To William Robinson

The origin of the word Naga is unknown, but it has been supposed to have derived from the Sanskrit word (*nanga*) and applied in division to the people from the paucity of their clothing: but there seem little foundation for this etymological derivation as the term has never been known to be applied by the Bengalees to either the Khasis or the Garos with whom they were

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- 3 J.H.Hutton, "Mixed Culture of Naga Tribes", reprinted from the *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, p.19.
- 4 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, Macmillan, London, 1926, p.1.
- 5 Several Naga Tribes are: Angami, Ao, Rengma, Konyak, Sangtam, Chakesang, Chang, Mao, Lotha, Tangkhul, Sema, Zeliang etc. (Altogether about 32, in Nagaland, 14 Major tribes).
- 6 See G.R.Gerini, *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography*, London, 1909. Morindle, *Ancient India*, 1885; K.L.Barua, *Early History of Kamrup*, Shillong, 1933, P.C.Choudhury, *A History of the Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century*, Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam (University of London, thesis).

far better acquainted than the Nagas: and besides, the Garos especially are habitually accustomed to a greater degree of nudity than any of the Naga tribes with whom we are acquainted.⁷

This theory is supported by J.H. Hulton, H.B. Rowan, Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf and M. Alemchiba among others.

S.E. Peal in the late half of the nineteenth century propounded a theory which traces its (Naga) derivation from *Nok* meaning man or folk, as in some of the Tibeto-Burman languages like those of the Aos, Noctes and Garos. It has also been found that *Nok* or *Noka* in Benfera Naga (Konyak tribe of Mon district in Nagaland) language means people. This view is well accepted by scholars like Holcombe, E.A. Gait, Verrier Elwin and M. Horam. To quote Verrier Elwin:

The most likely derivation to my mind is that which traces 'Naga' from the word 'Nok' or people which is its meaning in a few Tibeto-Burman languages.... It is common throughout India for tribesmen to call themselves by words meaning "Man" an attractive habit which suggests that they look on themselves simply as people free from communal or caste association.⁸

Meanwhile a few Naga scholars have done some substantial work on this contentious issue discounting the views of the colonial writers. Gangmumei and others are of the opinion that the word *Naga* has been derived from the Kachari word *Nok* or *Nokhar* meaning warrior or fighter, as the Kacharis came

7 William Robinson, 1841, "A Descriptive Account of Assam", in Verrier Elwin, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp.83-84.

8 Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland*, Research Department, Advisors Secretariat, Shillong, 1961, p.6.

into violent conflict with Naga tribes like the Angamis and Zeliangrong.⁹ Whereas R.R.Shimray in his "Origin and Culture of the Nagas" opined that it was derived from the Burmese word *Naka* meaning pierced ears. M.Horam has also brought out the probable derivation of the word *Naga* from *Naokhoka* meaning a very brave child, in the Tangkul dialect (A Naga tribe of Manipur).¹⁰

According to another story, from an aged man of the Ao tribe, the Nagas once had their own script which was written on a piece of animal skin. One day a dog got hold of the precious piece of skin and began chewing it. A man from the plains saw this and began to shout *Nakhapi* or *Nakhao* meaning 'don't eat'. The dog nevertheless, destroyed the skin and from that day the people of these hilly tracts were called *Nakha*, then *Noga* and later *Naga*.¹¹

In spite of all the theories, opinions or stories at our disposal it is rather difficult to give the exact derivation of the generic term *Naga*. But what baffles everyone is that some tribes come under this generic form *Naga*, while certain tribes,¹² who are living side by side with the Nagas, do not come under this name. Most scholars are of the opinion that originally these people

9 Gangmumei Kabui, *Genesis of the Ethnoses of Nagas and Kuki-Chin*, Kohima, Naga Students' Federation, 1993, p.4.

10 *Nagas at Work*, A Naga Students' Union Delhi presentation, 1996, p.64.

11 M.Horam, *Naga Polity*, L.P.Publication, Delhi, 1992, p.25.

12 The Kukis, the Meities etc. belong to Mongoloid race but they do not come under the term *Naga*, though they are inhabiting areas adjacent to the Nagas.

did not have the generic term Naga for the whole race.¹³ It was only after their contact with modern administration that the generic term *Naga* was given to them by other people. In some tribes they did not even have a common name for themselves but used to be denoted by a specific name for a group of villages.¹⁴ Even the present tribal names, like Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sema and Tangkul, seems to have been coined by outsiders, most probably by the British Administrators. Each Naga tribe had and continues to have its own name. For instance,

1. Angami tribe was known as tenjimia;
2. Ao tribe was known as Cholimi or Aorr (Hathiguria to Assamese);
3. Chang tribe was known as Mochumi;
4. Karcha tribe was known as Mechemi;
5. Konyak tribe was known as Taprongumi;
6. Lotha tribe was known as Chizima;
7. Mao tribe was known as Sopomi;
8. Rengma tribe was known as Mezama;
9. Sangtam tribe was known as Lohphomi;
10. Sema tribe was known as Semi;
11. Yachimi tribe was known as Yamsongrr; and so on.

13 Notes on the wild tribe inhabiting the so-called Naga Hills in our North-East frontier of India, a paper read by Lieutenant Colonel R.G.Woodthrope R.E., 8 March 1881 in the meeting of the Anthropological institute.

14 Ibid.

The present awareness of being one people was understandably absent among the Nagas till very recently. Otherwise head-hunting alone could have prevented their coming together or seeing in each other similarities which now pronounced them to be one people, though divided into tribes. Not only were the tribes separate from each other but even villages inhabited by the same tribe were often on terms far from friendly.¹⁵ Consequently, each tribe has its own culture and language and social structure. The situation was further complicated by the fact that among most tribes the village was an autonomous unit, a kind of village-state, which was often in conflict with neighbouring villages of the same tribe. Hence among tribes like the Tangkhuls of Manipur, each village developed its own dialect which was unintelligible to people of the same tribe belonging to other villages.

However, it is generally assumed that those tribes which are spoken of as the Nagas, have something in common which distinguishes them from the many other tribes found in the North-East of India. It is also a term that has come to stay and is synonymous with the new found sense of identity which compels these tribes to differentiate themselves from the neighbouring hill tribes and other people. There are certainly some special marks by which Naga tribes are distinguished from their neighbours and some common ties by which the Nagas are bound together as one people. W.C. Smith enumerates several characteristics of the Nagas, but cautions that these cultural traits do not

15 M.Horam, *Naga Polity...*, pp.24-25.

uniformly occur in all the Naga tribes, even though it is clear that in the remote past, they came from the same stock.¹⁶ They are:

- 1.. Head Hunting
2. Common sleeping houses for the unmarried man which are taboo to women.
3. Dwelling houses built on posts or piles.
4. Disposal of death on raised platform.
5. A sort of trial marriage, or great freedom of intercourse between the sexes before the marriage.
6. Aversion to milk as an article of diet.
7. Tatooning by pricking.
8. Absence of any powerful political organization.
9. The double cylinder vertical forge.
10. The loom for weaving cloth.
11. A large quadrangular or hexagonal shield.
12. Residence in hilly regions and a crude form of agriculture.¹⁷

Origin and Migration of the Nagas

B.B.Goswami has clarified the various ethnic composition of the North East India into three language families, the Monkhmer, the Tibeto-Burman and

16 Mongolian racial stock.

17 W.C.Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, London, MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1925, p.120.

the Siamese-Chinese family. To the Tibeto-Burman family belong people "distributed all over the hills and plains of Assam" - the Nagas, the Kuki-Chin and the Bodo.¹⁸ Ethnologically, the hill tribes of the North East Frontier are primarily of the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with a sprinkling of Austric and Dravidian blood.¹⁹ Verrier Elwin writes that Nagas are ethnically an Indo-Mongoloid folk, living in the North-eastern hills of India, divided into over a dozen languages and dialects. For instance, the Angami speaks Angami and the Ao speaks Ao. And some tribes are divided into sub-tribes having their own dialects. Aos are divided into Chongli and Mongsen, having further dialect differentiations. Even Chakhesangs who live in the eastern part of Kohima district consists of Chakris, Khegas and Sangtams, each speaking their local dialects. This diversity of language has led some to believe that the Nagas are not of a common origin.

Henry Bolfour says "its absurd that the Nagas are the members of the Tibeto-Burman family of people, because the tradition of the Nagas points South-eastward through which their ancestors travelled." The Oxford Encyclopedia also says that "They (Nagas) are for the most part Mongolian both in physical type and language and in customs they are in someway, like the hillmen and islanders of south-East Asia". Their oral traditional stories

18 See B.B.Goswami, "The Tribes of Assam: A Few Comments on Their Sonal and Cultural Ties with the Non-Tribes", in K.Suresh Singh (ed.), *Tribal Situation in India* (1972), pp.271-2.

19 E.Gaits, *A History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1926, Introduction to first edition, p.25, and *Census of India, 1891, Assam, vol.1, Report*, pp.221-90.

which are surviving to this day also amply prove their migration to the present habitat from the east, though in different times through different routes. Therefore, they are not autochthonous people.²⁰

Whatever might have been the route of their migration or their original home, Nagas appear closely akin to the primitive communities of Indo-China, Malaya, Indonesia, Taiwan and the Philippines Islands. Smith, a Christian missionary and a sociologist enumerates twelve characteristics of the Nagas that are in common with the Indonesians, that is the people of Malaya and the island of Indonesia. Some of them are head-hunting, common sleeping houses for unmarried men, disposal of death on raised platforms, tattooing by pricking, hilly residences etc. This shows that at one time or other the Nagas were closely connected with the tribes of South-East Asia, particularly with the Dyaks of Borneo, the Baltaks of Sumatra, Igorots, Ifugaos and others of Philippines, and some tribes of Formosa.²¹

Traditional Story of Naga Migration

A traditional belief held by some of the major Naga tribes such as Lotha, Sema, Rengma, Angami and Chakhesang²² is that they originated from a cave

20 *Mokokchung District Gazetteer*, 1979, p.27.

21 See, J.P.Mills, Ao Nagas, xii-xiii, *Gazetteer of India: Nagaland, Kohima District*, 1970, pp.19-21.

22 Chakhesang is a combination of three tribes. It has been formed by taking the first letters of each tribe, Cha of Chakru, Khe of Kheza and Sang of Sangtam.
(continued...)

at Khezakenoma. According to this traditional story, which varies in respect of detail to some extent, all these five tribes came out of the cave at Khezakenoma, in the South-east of Nagaland bordering Manipur, and thence migrated in different directions and settled in different places. It is said that the Aos went ahead and were followed by the Lothas and then the Semas. Later the Rengmas, were followed by the Angamis and Chakhesang. Interestingly the Semas refer to the Aos as *Cholimi* which means *Chunglir*, the people of Chungliyimti or "gone ahead"; while Lothas are referred to as *Chiwomi* which means "who preceded". Angamis are called *Tsungumi* which means "left behind". This Sema nomenclature for other tribes corroborates the order of migration. Again, there are some villages with Ao names claimed to be left by the Aos before moving northward which the Lothas occupied. In their argument the Lothas maintain that they had occupied those villages forcibly from the Aos. Nevertheless, it goes to prove that the Aos went ahead of the Lothas, B.B.Ghosh.²³

The traditional Ao Naga story traces its origin from Longtrok (discussed later in this chapter), and since the other tribes make no mention of their having emerged from Khezakenoma it only proves that the Aos were the first settlers in this land, whether they emerged from Longtrok or not.

22(...continued)

It was formerly known as Eastern Angami. They came to be known as Chekhesang only in 1948.

23 *Mokokchung Gazetteer*, pp.26-27.

Ao Nagas

The Aos comes under the generic term "Naga" and they represent one of the major tribes of Nagaland. Ethnologically, though they belong to the same mongoloid stock the 'Aos' present several characteristics not found in any of the Naga tribes. Their custom of disposing the death by laying them out on platforms; their elaborately organised village councils; their claim to have emerged from the earth not at the Kezakenoma stone but near Chongliymti on the right bank of the Dikhu; their tattooed women folk; their division into language groups, their complicated clans, and phratry rights, all distinguish them sharply from their Sema and Lotha neighbours.²⁴

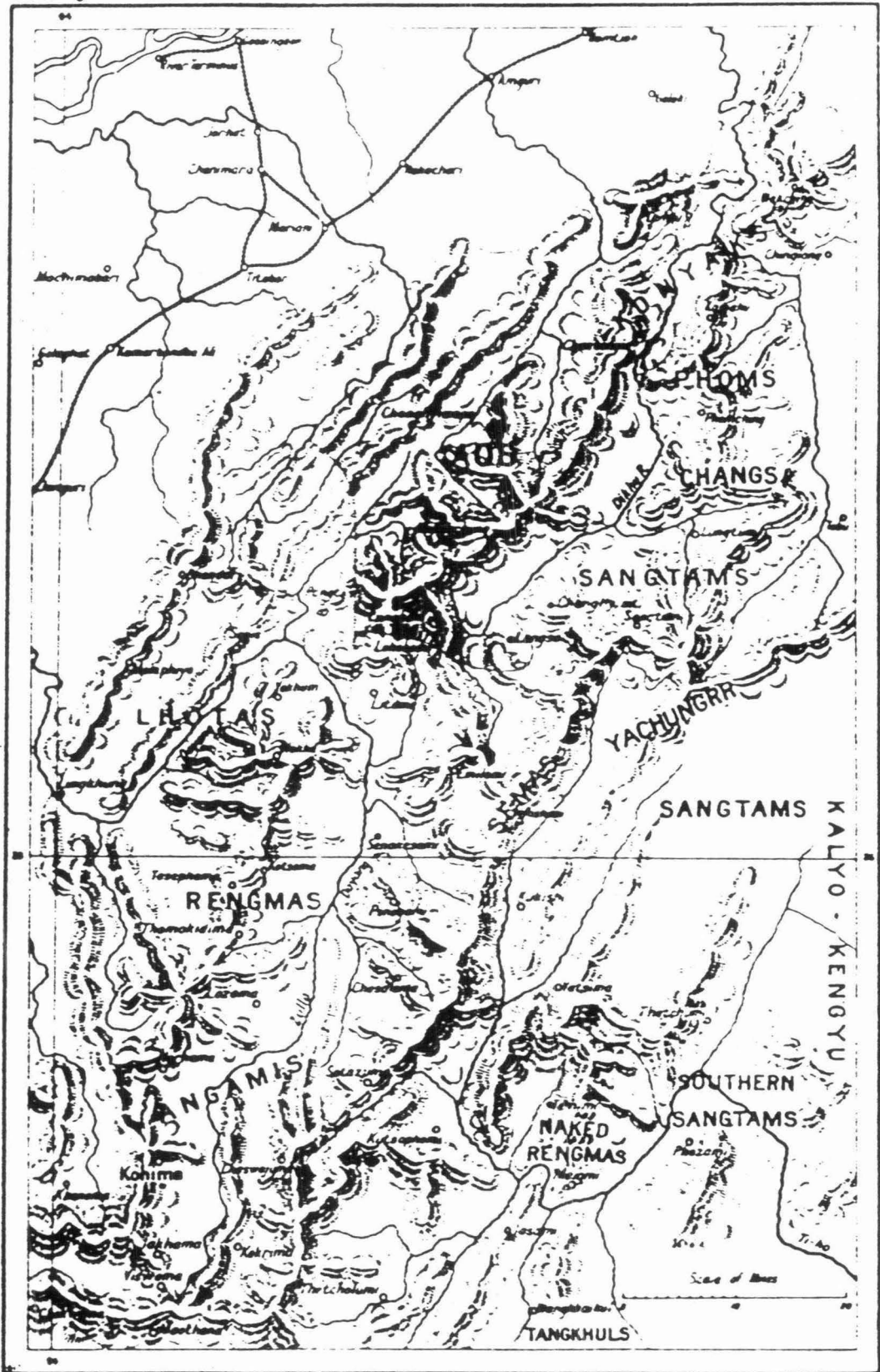
Land and the People

Mokokchung, the land of the Aos, is situated between 26° 6' and 26° 48'N and 94°16' and 94° 50'E, with an area of 733 square miles.²⁵ It is bounded by the state of Assam on the north and three districts of Nagaland, namely Tuensang district on the east, Zunheboto district on the south and parts of Wokha district and Assam on the west. The Ao country is located east of the Dikhu river on four parallel ranges running south to north towards the Brahmaputra plain. They are named as follows: The Langbangkong (bedrange) so called from a fancied resemblance to a bed, running along the left bank of

24 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.1.

25 B.C.Allen, *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India*, Mittal Publication, Delhi, reprinted 1993, p.480.

MAP SHOWING AOS AND NEIGHBOURING TRIBES



Dikhu; Parallel to it, to the North-west, the Asukong (river range), a low irregular range flanked by small rivers; again parallel and to the North-West the Chankikong, called after Chanki village, which stand on it; and finally the Chapvokong, called after Chapvu village.²⁶

Origin and Migration of AOs

The Ao Nagas besides being related to the other hill tribes of Burma and Assam have affinities outside the mainland of Asia. There are several marked points of similarity between the Ao Nagas on the one hand and the Dyaks of Borneo and the Igorot of the Philippines on the other. J.H.Hulton also traces the origin of the AOs to Fiji and anthropologist, Fay-Cooper, draws our attention to one minor point linking the Ao tribes directly with South-east China²⁷ - the use of single cylinder piston-bellows, similar to the one used by the Miao-Tsu of the Upper Mekong. Hiram is of the opinion that the AOs must have come from the South Eastern part of Burma and passed through Manipur upwards to Wokha, in the Lotha country, which they occupied for a considerable period, in course of their migration. From here they probably went to Longtorok.

26 J.P. Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.1. There are two more ranges, Ongpangkong the southern most range and Tsurangkong which is newly formed range bordering Northwest of the district.

27 See J.H.Hulton, "Preface", in J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.xiii.

According to Ao legend and tradition, the Aos came out from a cave called Longterok, migrated to a place called Chungliyimti and began to settle there. Another theory is that the Aos emerged from Longterok, the six stones which lie in the Sangtam area, on the eastern side of the Dikhu river.²⁸ Whatever the story of Chungliyimti, the first Ao settlement at Chungliyimti is of great importance and significance to the Ao people because it was here that the Aos attained a remarkable achievement as an organised society.

From their first settlement at Chungliyimti they migrated westward and after crossing the Dikhu river they settled at a place called Aunglenden where Soyum village (now called Ungma) was founded. Later they shifted to Koridong from whence they spread all over the five ranges of the present Ao country, founding as many as 81 villages, as at present.²⁹ These people who went ahead across the Dikhu river leaving others behind came to be known as *Aor* or *Ao* meaning "going" or "gone".

Significance of Longtrok

The tradition says, Aos emerged from the six stones at Longtrok near Chungliyimti village, and each stone is identified as a symbol of one of the major clans of the tribe. The stones are attributed gender differentiations. Out

28 *Alemchiba ao, A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, Kohima, Naga Institute of Culture, 1970, p.20.

29 *District Census Handbook, Mokokchung District Census, 1971*.

of six stones three are males and three females belonging in pairs to three different clans, one male and one female for each clan. They are:

- Tongpak (M) and Longkakupokla (F) of Pongen clan
- Longpok (M) and Yongmenzala (F) of Longkumer clan, and
- Longjakrep (M) and Elangshi (F) of Jamir clan.

In this civilization two dialects were spoken, Mongsen and Chungli. The Mongsen speakers came out first and settled in Kubok, followed by the Chungli speakers who settled at Chungliyimti. Later they regrouped themselves and came to the present Ao country.

Socio-Cultural Practices

Chungliyimti was the cradle of Ao civilization. It was here that the Aos first became conscious as "belonging to a distinct socio-cultural and political community, as one people".³⁰ B.B.Gosh the author of Mokokchung State Gazetteer writes, "It was here that the Aos attained a remarkable achievement as an organised society, a tribe with proper village government, distribution of powers, a set of customary law to abide by, and consciousness of moral and ethnical aspects of mankind. Some aspects of the traditional Ao Naga socio-cultural practices of this period are given below:

30 Mar Atsongchanger, *Christian Education and Social Change*, C.L.C.Guwahati, Assam 1995, p.13.

(a) Family

The Ao family consisted of the father, the mother and their children. They grouped together to form the household. Boys from 10 years onwards lived in *Ariju* (boys dormitory) with other boys of his village, while girls in small groups slept in like houses (*Zuki*) or in the house of some widow. There they were taught, trained and disciplined in various matters relating to their socio-cultural life. The family as a unit was broken by marriage when the sons established their own family, and daughters by the law of exogamy, wed a person from a marriageable clan or *kidong*.

The *kidong* (house tree or sib³¹) was the most important division, for it set the boundaries within which no inter-marriage could take place. It was also of considerable importance to other social activities. The descent in a *kidong* was traced only in the male line, for, by their exogamic laws, females passed over to other sibs when they married. The members of this group felt closely bound together, almost like members of a family. It was a common practice for one man to call another of the same *kidong* his brother, even though the relationship was quite remote. When hunting dangerous games, or when in battle array, the members of the same *kidong* were grouped together. Each sib had a distinctive platform of perticoat for its own women, a badge that showed the sib or origin which continued to be worn even after marriage.³²

31 A blood relation; a brother or sister; Chambers Concise dictionary, ACM, Delhi.

32 W.C.Smith, op.cit., p.50.

(b) The Village Set-up

The Ao villages were large distances apart, and were very distinct. They were built on the summits of big hills or ridges because in the days of head hunting, it was of considerable importance to locate the village on high places for defensive purposes.³³ Among the Aos the largest unit was the village, which was bound together by social, political and religious ties.³⁴ The village acted as a unit in all things and in these small homogeneous communities there was but little room for any individualistic tendency. Each village whether small or big worked on democratic lines of independence and self-rule. They were governed by the village council called *Putu-menden* which was formed by representatives of different clans. The representatives were the village elders, chosen from each clan called *Tatars*. Each village resembled Greek city-state. The decisions of the *Putu-menden* was final in all matters of the village governance. It decided matters on war, peace treaty, customary law etc. One *putu* could rule for thirty years, but it was far from being hereditary.

(c) Ariju: The Learning Institution

Also called *Morung* (the bachelors' dormitory), occupied a central place in the lives of the Aos. At a time when village boundaries were not fixed, but

33 Ibid, p.27.

34 Ibid, p.51.

depended largely upon the strength of the village concerns³⁵ and when there were bitter feuds between villages, Morungs played a significant role in maintaining the honour of the village. It housed the youth of the village, training them in the art of warfare from their childhood. They were the life and force of the village. An ill-kept Morung meant a weak village and a well-kept Morung signified a strong prosperous village. A village is often known by its Morung.

Besides being trained in warfare, for offensive and defensive purposes, it was also an institution of learning and recreation. Though the three Rs were not taught, as the Aos had no script, custom, culture and tradition, were transmitted from generation to generation through the media of folk-dance, music, folk-tales, oral historical tradition, wood carving etc., which were taught in the *Ariju*.³⁶

The *Ariju* was classified into six batches of groups called *Zunger* and in each batch one had to spend three years before being promoted to the next higher batch. The work of each batch varied from carrying water, firewood to deciding cases, interpreting tradition and village governance. J.P. Mills noted, "A morung is a microcosm of the village and has its own council, reminding one strongly again of a public school with its prefects."³⁷

35 Ibid, p.32.

36 Mr.Atsongchanger, pp.14-15.

37 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.180.

(d) Language

The Nagas had complex linguistic diversity. Each tribe had one or more dialect which was unintelligible to the other tribe. The Ao dialect placed in the central-subgroup of the Naga language by Sir George Grierson³⁸ in his linguistic survey of India, is divided into a number of dialects such as *Chungli*, *Mongsen* and *Chanki*. A.W.Davis opined, "Chungli and Mongsen are so dissimilar as to be practically different languages, though these two tribes in many instances live side by side in the same village."³⁹ When census was taken in 1891, out of the 46 villages, 21 were entirely Chungli speaking villages; 19 Mongsen, and the rest 6 villages were inhabited by both the Chungli and Mongsen moieties. Besides Chugli, Mongsen and Chanki there was one more language namely, Merinokpu, and it was spoken only by the Merinokpu village which was quite different from the other three languages.

(e) Head Hunting

Before the dawn of Christianity and modern civilization, head hunting was a part of everyday life of the Nagas. From all evidences that can be gathered, the Aos were in a state of constant hostility towards each other, culminating in the cutting and carrying away of head trophies, the glory of

38 Quoted in *ibid*, p.284. Grierson's survey was published in Calcutta in 1903.

39 "The Aos in 1891", (A.W.Davis, in *Census of India, 1891, Assam, vol.1, pp.241-5*) in Verrier Elwin, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, OUP, 1969.

head hunting. A head hunter was ceremoniously honoured and respected as a warrior and hero in the Ao society. Therefore it was the greatest desire of every Ao male to be a successful head hunter. W.C. Smith writes "To the Nagas there is nothing more glorious than bravery and success in battle, which meant the bringing of an enemy head back to the village, because of which his praise would be sung. Men were called boys, women or even cows until they had made a contributing to the village skull house, after which they become full-fledged member of the community, and badge of honour were bestowed upon them in that they were privilege to wear certain ornaments hitherto denied them. The same held true of villages for the village that has taken only a few skull were held in contempt.⁴⁰

Head hunting had socio-cultural, religious and political implication. The Aos believed that it would bring prosperity to their village in the shape of bumper crops, many children and good hunting.⁴¹ Secondly a man was entitled to wear special dress and ornaments, and also decorate his house, signifying special status, according to the number of head-trophies won. In addition to these, Aos say that it was distinctly a religious motive, for by killing some other villager they would be pleasing the god Lizaba.⁴²

40 W.C.Smith, *op.cit.*, p.72.

41 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.200.

42 W.C.Smith, *op.cit.*, p.71.

(f) Religion

William Robinson, speaking on ancient Naga religion writes, "Among the Nagas we discern apprehension of some invisible and powerful beings. These apprehensions however seem at first to be suggested to the mind rather by the dread of impending evil, than to flow from gratitude for blessings received."⁴³ "When... primitive man", says Jevons,⁴⁴ "realized that he was in the hands of mysterious and supernatural power, it was inevitable that he should cast about for some means of entering into satisfactory relations with that power. The primitive man is face to face with the old time worn problem of suffering: he sees how the innocent suffer, seemingly without cause. And so it is really the most natural thing for him to assume that all about him there were malevolent spirits or demons that produce all this misery."⁴⁵

The Aos had a general idea of a good deity, but did does not interfere on their behalf so they payed no attention to him. The sacrifices were made only to those who might work harm. The Aos had a number of gods, they are:

- (a) *Lungkijingba* (stone house deity): the great god, the highest of all gods, the god of heaven who fixes the destiny of all men.
- (b) *Lizaba*: To him is given the credit for the creation of the world. He is the deity living in closest relation to men, with him they have the most

43 W.Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, 1841 pp.395 ff in Verrier Elwin, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, OUP, 1969, p.502.

44 F.B.Jevons, *An Introduction to the History of Religion*, London, 1896, p.20

45 W.C.Smith, op.cit., p.75.

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dealings, consequently most offerings go to him. He is in charge of the rains, the storms, consequences of crops, and command over sickness and diseases.

(c) *Mojing*: He is the ruler in the abode of the departed soul. He judges the soul of a man.

In addition to them there are many others not so definitely named. *Tsungrem* is the general term for deity, of which there are several. For instance *Kimung tsungrem* (house site deity), *Ki-tsung tsungrem* (house deity), *Arem tsungrem* (jungle deity), etc. The Ao Naga religion was not a moral code but a system of ceremonies and rites to appease the spirit which sought to harm the people. They observed numerous taboos and gennas so as not to incur their wrath. Animal sacrifice was common.

(g) Platform Burial

The Ao Nagas did not bury their dead immediately, but placed them on high raised platforms in the front room of the living house. If it was a male the body was kept for six days, and if female, five days, after which they were carried to the graveyard, generally situated by the roadside at the entrance of the village. The dead bodies were scorched and according to the social status and means of the man, spears, daos and carved images etc., were placed on all sides of the body. However, if a person died of *mineri* (unnatural death) the

body was not kept in the house for even a single day, it was removed on the very day of death.⁴⁶

(h) Slavery

Slavery was practiced among the Aos before the territory was annexed by the British. Mills writes "not only were slaves bought from neighbouring tribes in old days, but number of Aos were sold into slavery. This was the common fate for a man who could not pay his debts and whose relation could not or would not pay them for him."⁴⁷ A slave lost all his clan rights, and he could not marry and set up house on his own. Female slaves were not allowed to be tattooed, to get married or have children. However A.W. Davis observed that on the whole the slaves were well-treated, and considered as a member of his master's family.⁴⁸

(i) Status of Women

The Ao Naga society was an egalitarian society. There was no caste system. A women enjoys considerable freedom, and she was in no way inferior to a man. When a girl reached the age of puberty she lived in the house of a widow called *Zuki* with other girls, where she was taught, trained

46 S.N.Majumdar, *Ao Nagas*, Calcutta, 1925, p.57.

47 J.P.Mills, op.cit., p.211.

48 A.W.Davis, in *Census of India, 1891, Assam, vol.1, pp.241-5* in Verrier Elwings, *Nagas in Nineteenth Century*, p.326.

and disciplined in the various arts of cooking, making clothes etc. She was never made to feel that she belonged to a weaker sex. Haimendrof rightly remarked on the status of Naga women "Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages."⁴⁹

49 C.von Furer Haimendrof, *The Naked Nagas*, Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1962, p.101.

CHAPTER II

AGENCIES OF CHANGE DURING THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The Advent of Colonial Power in Northeast India

The invasion of Assam by the Shan tribe about the year 1228, was a decisive factor in shaping the whole history of the North-East India. The Ahoms through a policy of conquest and annexation took control of upper Assam, and by 1700 A.D conquered the kingdom of Kamarupa, the ruler of Assam since the fourth century. Else where in India the colonial power was busy consolidating their political hegemony, and by 1792 became the sole master of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. At this juncture of history there was a crisis in the Anglo-Burmese relation owing to the contentions of the Burmese over Chittagong, Murshidabad and Burdwan. Ultimately the government of Amherst declared war against the Burmese and brought the entire Brahmaputra vally under its control. Prome, the capital of lower Burma, was also brought under its control. On 24th February 1826¹ The treaty of Yandabo was concluded by which the British acquired the control over the whole of Brahmaputra valley, Carchar, Manipur and Jaintia.² Thus Assam came under the control of the British and David Scott was appointed as the first

1 S.K.Bhugan, *Anglo-Assamese Relation*, (Calcutta, 1974), p.547-50.

2 P.C.Chakravarty, *British Relation with the Hill Tribes of Assam*, (Calcutta, 1964), p.16.

commissioner of Assam. It was during this time the Britishers came into contact with the hill tribals that fringe its territory, including the Nagas.

Ahom-Naga Relation

The accounts of the Hindu Kings of Mamrup who ruled Assam between the fourth and the twelfth centuries are silent about the Nagas. However "Buranjis", the chronicles of the Ahom kings, throw some light on the Naga relation with the Ahoms. Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom Kingdom had entered Assam from Burma in 1228 through the Tirap area of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Ahoms' first contact with the tribals was with the Wancho, Nocte, and Konyak tribes. As the kingdom expanded the Ahoms came into contact with the Lothas, Angamis, Zeliangrong and the Aos. The Buranjis usually referred to this people as the Nagas and attached the villages and habitats with names in adjective.³ The Aos were known as 'Hatigorias' and village like Molungyimchen, Yimchenkimong, and Merangkong were known as Deka Haimong, Bura Haimong and Nowgong respectively.⁴ There were frequent clashes between the Ahoms and the Nagas, at different times but their relationship was based on a mixture of friendliness and hostility which was ratified periodically through gifts and presents as protocol formalities.⁵

3 Alemchiba, Ao, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, 1970, p.29.

4 Limawati, "Traditional Ao Naga Social Control", Diss., JNU, 1979.

5 Alemchiba, Ao, *A Brief Historical Amount of Nagaland*, 1970, p.39.

The Nagas paid tribute to the Ahom Kings in the form of Mithuns and other commodities. The Ahoms, in return, granted to the Nagas revenue, free loans and fishing waters (beels) on the understanding that they would desist from making any predatory raids into the plains. These lands were called Naga Khats and were managed by Assamese agents called Naga-Katakis. It was customary for the Nagas, going on trading missions to the plains, to deposit their spears with the Katakis and retain them on their return.⁶

Throughout this period the Ahom chronicles tell of Naga raids on Assam and the subsequent retaliation by Ahom kings in the form of occasional punitive expeditions. However, the extraordinary rugged terrain of the Naga Hills doomed such expeditions and indirectly protected the Nagas from subjugation by the Assamese and with it, assimilation into Hindu society. Thus the two cultures remained apart. Ahom kings preferred to regard Naga tribes as inferior tributary vassals, though they never came near to conquering the tribes. For their part Nagas being economically self sufficient, simply ignored the Assamese and never developed anything like a regular trading relationship.⁷ The policy of the Ahom rulers vis-a-vis the tribals had been one of conciliation. Their concern was that the hill people should confine themselves to their habitat

6 Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1972, p.11.

7. Richard M.Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas, 1876-1971, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol.21, no.1, January-March 1984, pp.3-4.

in the mountains and forest and that no provocation should be offered that might cause them to raid the villages in the plains.⁸

British Administration and Policy Towards The Nagas

After taking control over Assam from the Ahoms, the British followed, by and large, their predecessor's policy "a least possible interference" with the tribal people in the hills. The British interest was primarily commercial: the development of the tea industry and later, the exploitation of oil, mineral and forest resources. Their concern with the hillmen was strictly limited - that they should not come in the way of acquisition of land required for establishing tea gardens nor interfere with the functioning of such gardens when established. It was only when their commercial interest was infringed upon that the British administration launched expeditions from time to time to punish the offending Naga villages. The colonial power had no intension to annex the Naga Hills which gave them no commercial gain, in terms of raw material, revenue or market for their products, nor had they any desire to interfere in the affairs of the Hill tribes. Instead it would incur extra expenditure in governance, were it to be made a part of British territory. The only importance of 'Naga Country', the inaccessible land of the fierce, waring Naga tribes, was mainly geo-political in nature. It acted as a buffer territory between China, Burma and

8 Nari Rustomji, *Imperilled Frontier, India's North-Eastern Borderlands*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, p.23.

the British administered India. It also served as a pad for absorbing external aggression, protecting the British ruled land from a possible Burmese invasion, of which they had had a bitter experience in the past.

The legal status of the Nagas at this period is made clear by what J. Butler said "Under the ancient Assam government some of the tribes may have been more dependent on the government than they are now, but the Naga territory was never considered an integral portion of the sovereignty of Assam... and never been considered subject to our regular jurisdiction".⁹ Gait observed that "The tract inhabited by the various tribes known as Nagas had never been subjugated by the Ahoms, and it was no part of the British policy to observe it".¹⁰ Later due to incessant Naga raids on their territory, the British were compelled to change their stance from non-interference to a more aggressive policy of annexing the Naga country. To quote Robert Reid, "The necessity of protecting the borders of Nowgong and Sibsagar against raiding Nagas which in the early days compelled us to penetrate into the Naga hills little by little, ceased with the formation of the Naga Hills district"¹¹ in 1881. This chapter focuses on the British administration and its policy towards the Nagas from 1831 to 1950 and attempts to throw light on the various

9 J. Butler, *Sketch of Assam*, Smith Elder and Co, London, 1847, p.120.

10 Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (3rd edition), Calcutta, 1963, p.366.

11 Sir Robert Reid, *The History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*, 1883-1941, First published 1942, reprinted in 1983, by Eastern Publishing House, Delhi, p.100.

changes it brought about in the socio-cultural and political life of the Nagas, Aos in specific, with the induction of modern political system.

The British relation with the Nagas may be divided into three periods. The first period from 1832 to 1850 was one in which the British undertook 'military promenades' into the Naga Hills. During the second period from 1851 to 1865, the British followed a policy of non-intervention with regard to the Naga tribes. This was later abandoned and in the third period, which began from 1866, the British steadily extended and established their control and authority over the entire Naga Hills.¹²

a) **First Phase Military Expedition**

The British first came into contact with the Nagas in 1832, when Captain Jenkins and Pemberton led an expedition from Manipur through the Naga country to establish communication link between Assam and Manipur.¹³ The expedition was met with stiff resistance from the Nagas who rolled down stones from the summit of the hills, threw spears and did their utmost by yelling and intimidation to obstruct the advance of the force.¹⁴ In the following year, Raja Gombin Singh of Manipur also marched through the hills accompanied by Lt Gordan, taking a route slightly different from the one followed by Jenkins.

12 Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, p.11.

13 Foreign Department, External Affairs, March 1832, p.70 (NAI).

14 A.J.Moffat Mills, Report on the Province of Assam 1854, cited by V.Elwin in *the Nagas in the Nineteenth century*, Bombay, 1969, p.114.

Mackenzie tells us that it was understood that Manipur in a general way exercised some sort of authority over the southern portion of the Naga Hills.¹⁵ In fact in 1835 the forest between the Doyang and the Dansiri river was declared the boundary between Assam and Manipur.

The annexation of Cachar on 14th August 1832 on the death of its Raja, was another factor which brought the British into contact with the Angamis. The British first tried to entrust the not so easy task of controlling the turbulent Naga tribes to the Raja of Manipur and Cachar, who was protected by the British.¹⁶ But in 1835 when the Naga raids became frequent in the Cachar and Manipur frontiers, Tularam Senapati openly stated his inability to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining order in the Naga Hills. He reverted the responsibility back to the British. Thus the British policy towards the Nagas from 1832 to 1881, formed the background of the study of British occupation of the Naga Hills.

However reluctant, the British made arrangements in 1833 to depute one officer specially to deal with the Nagas. Gange a Sub-Assistant at Nowgong, was entrusted with the task. He led the expedition into the Angami Naga areas in 1839 and 1840 but without much success. Another expedition was launched during 1840-42 under Lt. Bigge. This time the encounter was without much opposition and he was able to contact friendly agreements with the village

15 A. Mackenzie, "History of the Relations of the government with the Hill tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884, p.102.

16 Foreign Department, POL, December 1839, no.,90 (NAI).

chiefs, on whose requests, he opened a salt depot at Dimapur. In 1843 there was no military promenade into the Naga Hills.

In 1845 John Butler, the Principle Assistant Commissioner of Nowgong made a tour of the Naga hills and negotiated an agreement of peace with the chief of Khonoma on 11 December 1845. But it was short lived. The British administration in order to maintain peaceful relations often offer incentives in the form of trading facilities, especially for essential commodities needed by the Nagas viz salt, dry fish, steel utensils, oil, cloth etc. Unfortunately often government's peace efforts faltered on the Nagas. In 1841 the Naga village chief from Angami area went down to Nowgong and made an agreement with the government, promising to obey and pay a yearly tribute.¹⁷ However, in December 1844, the Chief refused to pay the tribute to the British.¹⁸ As a result the government once again sent an expedition in November 1845, under Captain Butler, who successfully collected the tributes from the Chief.¹⁹

While pursuing the policy of friendly relations with the Nagas, the government was simultaneously drawn into internal problem of the Nagas, which made it imperative for them to interfere and settle the disputes. On 3rd August 1848, the government sent an expedition to the hills to settle such internal feuds between Nilholi and Jubili, two chiefs of the Mezome village.

17 Foreign Department, POL, A, June 1842, nos. 10-13.

18 Foreign Department, POL, May 1846, nos.30-31 (NAI).

19 Department of POL, A, June 1845, nos. 125-126 (NAI).

Unfortunately, Bhogchond, the leader of the expedition, was halted by a combined attack of Mezoma and Khonoma villages,²⁰ who did not like the settlement. Bhogchond conducted the whole proceeding as he could have done in a riot case in the plains. To chastise the offending Nagas captain Vincent was sent to the hills in March 1850.

In an interesting incident which followed, on 8th February 1851, Kekhima, a powerful village, sent two messengers to the camp of Captain Vincent, who had been visiting Naga villages, offering a trial of strength. They handed over a handsome spear to Vincent with the remark, "your sepoy are flesh and blood as well as ourselves. Come and fight men to men, here is a specimen of our weapon".²¹ Vincent, with a strong contingent armed with one hundred and fifty muskets, two-three pounders, a mortar, and supported by eight hundred troops, was despatched to meet the challenge. The Kekhima, though brave, were no match for the British force which used modern military fire arms against their 'daos' and spears.

b) Second Phase: Non Intervention

Following the bad experience which led to the killing of Bhogchand and the unrelenting hostility of the Naga tribes, the British authority decided to withdraw from the hills and abstain from any kind of interference in the affairs

20 Foreign Department, Pol, A, November 1849, nos.157-158 (NAI).

21 Foreign Department , POL, A, March 1851, no.245(NAI).

of the Nagas. Lord Dalhousie, on 20th February 1851, commenting on this subject remarked:

I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining a control, that is to say, of taking possession of these hills and of establishing our sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. One possession could bring no profit to us, and would be as costly to us as it would be unproductive. The only advantage which is expected from one having possession of the country by those who advocate the measures is the termination of the plundering inroads which the tribes now make from the hills on our subjects at the foot of them. But this advantage may more easily, more cheaply and more justly be obtained by refraining from all seizure of the territory of these Nagas and by confirming ourselves to the establishment of effective means of defence on the line of our frontiers.... Here after, we should confine ourselves to our own ground; protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fight of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful towards us and rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got or to buy they want if they should become turbulent or troublesome.²²

In all British official correspondence between the years 1851 to 1865 the policy of non-intervention is emphasised. Piketo Sema used the phrase "Defence of the low-land" to explain the British policy of non-intervention. The immediate British concern was to protect the British District of Assam and keep the Nagas at bay.

This laissez-faire was followed for about fifteen years. Dimapur was abandoned and Borpathar became the forward post. At one stage the British even contemplated abandoning North Cachar when they found it difficult to protect the areas from the depredation of the hostile tribes. The Nagas on their

22 A Mackenzie, op.cit, p.114.

part, celebrated the withdrawal of British troops by making twenty two raids in 1851 alone. During 1852-1862, 19 raids occurred in which 252 British subjects were either killed, wounded or carried off.²³ Commenting on the awkward situation the local officers reported to the Lt Governor in 1862 as follows:

It is not creditable to our government that such atrocities should recur annually with unvarying certainty, and that we should be powerless alike to protect our subjects or to punish the aggressors. It is quite certain that our relations with the Nagas could not possibly be on a worse footing than they are now. The non-interference policy is excellent in theory, but the government will probably be inclined to think that it must be abandoned.²⁴

This view was upheld by Lt. Governor, Sir Cecil Beadon, who urged the government of India to reorient its policy towards the Nagas. He felt that the only alternative, was to reassert the government's authority and bring them under a system of administration suited to their circumstances, and gradually to refrain them from habits of lawlessness to those of order and civilization.²⁵

c) Third Phase : PAX Britannica

In pursuance of the above policy the government finally decided to establish the district of Naga Hills. In 1866, Lt Gregory established himself at Samaguting (Chumukedima) in order to protect the British occupied districts

23 Piketo Sema, *op.cit.*, p.100.

24 Mackenzie, *op.cit.*, p.116, Also Political Proceeding, April 1860, nos.4 and 5.

25 Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, p.17.

of Nowgong and Sibsagar from the raiding Nagas. Samaguting was found a more suitable place from which Nowgong could be protected against western Angami raids especially from the powerful villages of Mozema, Khonoma and Jolsome.²⁶ The government was successful in checking the raids on their frontier but the Nagas continued to raid each other just across the border. The bigger village always oppressed and exploited the smaller villages. At the same time Naga raids continued on the villages under British control near the border. With two things on the agenda, firstly, to check Naga raids on their frontier and secondly, to stop inter-tribal feuds and raids, the government decided to move into the heart of the Naga country. Thus in 1876 the headquarter was shifted to Wokha, but when found unsuitable it was transferred to Kohima, in the centre of the turbulent Angami Country, on 24th March 1879.²⁷ An administrative report regarding the occupation of Kohima, its result and the future policy to be adopted in dealing with the Nagas read:

For some years, the various officers of this district have pressed strongly on government the necessity of the whole country inhabiting by the Naga tribes and introduction of a more vigorous policy than which had hitherto been in vogue eventually, the government of India was pleased to declare that time has come to interfere actively in inter-tribal feuds and suppress once for all, the system of murder which had so long flourished unchecked in the hills. In order that this policy might be effectively carried into effect, and that with great promptitude that could be done at Samagutri; it was decided that the Headquarters of the district should be move to a more commanding position in the centre of

26 Robert Ried, *op.cit.*, p.99.

27 Foreign Department, POL, A, January 1880, nos.495-497 (NAI).

the hills and the spot first chosen was Sokha. Doubts were, however, raised as to whether this was the best spot that could be found or not and last year Colonial Kerathing. Personally visited the hills and decided on Kohima as the best site for the new station. Subsequent events have fully vindicated wisdom of this choice. Apart from the fact that Kohima is in itself much better suited for a headquarter station than Wokha, it would have been impossible for an officer stationed at the latter place, a distance of 4 days journey, to have exercised any effective control over the Angamis the most turbulent and warlike of any of the tribes in the district.²⁸

The British occupation of Kohima was a landmark in the history of Anglo-Naga relation which was completed following the seize of Khonoma village in November 1879. The government took precautionary measures against further insurrection among the tribes. All the villages which had participated against the government were punished, and some villages like Khonoma were not allowed to resettle at their original village site, instead they were directed to settle in some accessible location.²⁹ Next, all villages had to submit to an agreement to pay 1 maud rice and 1 rupee per house per year as revenue, to provide a certain amount of labour annually for state purpose, and appoint a headmen who should be responsible for good order and carrying out the wishes of the government.³⁰ In 1874, Captain Jhonstone took three village under his protection who were willing to pay revenue to the government

28 Foreign Department, POL, A, January 1880, nos.498-511 (NAI).

29 Foreign Department, POL, A, January 1882, nos.1343-137, k.w. no.1 (NAI).

30 *ibid.*

in token of their submission. It has been rightly said that this was the first step towards the formal annexation of the Nagas Hills into the British India.

After successfully penetrating into the interior of the Naga country it was only a matter of time before the British government slowly extended its influence all over the Naga Hills. To quote Sir Robert Ried who was the Governor of Assam from 1937-41:

.... The process of penetration went on, inexorably or irregularly. It was impossible to draw a line as the boundary of our area of control and to say that we should be blind and deaf to all that went on across that line. Trans-frontier Naga raid our administered villages, the latter are involved in dispute with the former, headhunting and massacres go on just across the border and under the very noses of our officers. In such conditions local officers invariably, and with reason, clamour for forward policy. The Chief commissioner sometime support them, sometimes he does not. The government of India is nearly always reluctant. But the frontier move forward.³¹

Occupation of the Ao Country

Once the government established its headquarters at Kohima, inside the Naga Hills, its territory extended gradually by annexing one village after another. In 1881 Naga Hills district was formed but till then the Ao country was not included in their administration. In January 1844, Colonel Bordie, the Deputy Commissioner of the Sibsagar district, was the first officer who made

31 Robert Ried, pp.100-101.

a tour marching through the hills on the south of Sibsagar district between the Dikhu and Doyand rivers,³² the land of the Aos.

By then Christianity had already entered the Ao country. Rev Clark, who enforced the land in 1872, was the first Christian missionary to the Aos. According to Limawati "at this time the Aos had a semblance of order in their land however precarious it may have been." A balance of power was maintained throughout the confederacies of village. The conflict seems to have been confined to the inter-tribal sectors like Mangmetong Lungkum, Longsa and Ungma with Sema and Lotha tribes, Mongsenyimti and Merangkong etc., with the trans-tzula (Dikhu) tribes and such villages which stood out of the confederacy.³³

The British administration in all possible manners attempted to curb the internecine warfare among the villages. In 1881 the head of a Christian of Merangkong was taken by the Konyak Nagas. The Rev. E.W.Clark an American Baptist working in Ao areas asked for interference of the British authority in Sibsagar. On 1st December 1883, the Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar reported that two heads of Molung men were taken by men of Sungratsu with the help of Yimchenikimong near the Melak river. Sangratsu had an old feud with Molung, and Yimchenkimong had a grudge against the half-christianised Molung. The Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, Mc Cabe

32 Tajenyuba Ao, *British Occupation of Naga Country*, Naga Literature Society, Mokohchung, 1993, p.78.

33 Limawati, *Traditional AO Naga Social control*, p.25.

nearly launched an expedition against these villages, but negotiations settled the matter and on 28th February 1884, the Sangratsu *tatars* (village council) agreed to pay a fine of Rs.150..³⁴

In an interesting incident in May 1884, the Lotha Chief of Lakuti village reported to the Government the murder of his nephew, Tingpamo, in the Ao areas by the Mangmetong village. On refusal by the Mangmetong village to hand over the culprit a punitive expedition was sent under Mc Cabe, the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, to punish the offender. But Mc Cabe on inquiry found out that the chief's nephew and his friend, Seretung, were in the wrong and that Tingpamo was killed while they were trying to take the heads of Tonchang and Yemtang of Mangmetong village. The elders of Mangmetong village complained, "when we cut up any Lotha they complain to you and we are punished; but when the Lothas take our heads, we have no one to whom we can complain, we can not go to Wokha through the Lotha country, and have to suffer without redress."³⁵ The government fined Lakhti village Rs. 500 for giving false statement. On being fine the Lotha chief commented "Since we pay revenue and Mangmetong does not, I thought that the death of a Hatigotia did not matter, but that you were bound to avenge the death of one

34 *Foreign Proceedings*, January, 1882, pp.1-2.

35 *Foreign Proceedings*, October 1884, no.27.

of my men."³⁶ Mc Cabe advocated the annexation of the Ao country in his communication to the Chief Commissioner of Assam in June 1884.³⁷

The Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills was directed to conduct an expedition into Ao country in January 1884. He suggested that annexation was a practicle step towards the amalgamation of a considerable tract of Trans-Frontier within the British Districts.³⁸ The Deputy Commissioner, during his visit to the Ao country in January 1885, got news of Molungyimchen taking the heads of some Merangkong people and the latter's retaliation on Molung on 4th April 1886. A punitive expedition was sent against Merangkong consequently. The Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills also received information about the head hunting spree of Lungtung (Sema) and Are (Lotha) villages of Lungkum in May 1887 and 5th June 1887 respectively. He proposed inclusion of Lungkum and Mangmetong in British hands to curb future perpetuation of such acts.³⁹

In July 1888, the cruelest event in the recorded history of this area took place. It was a case of raid conducted by the combined villages of Trans-Dikhu area who massacred 173 people of Mongsenyinti and 44 people in Lungkhung village. The villages which took part in the offence were Noksen,

36 Foreign Proceedings, October 1884, no.27.

37 Assam Secretariate Judicial Department, File no.149, January 1884.

38 Government of India, Letter no.2465, E, 3rd February 1886.

39 Limawati, *Traditional Ao Nagas Social control*, p.50.

Litam, Slontak, Ljnbre, Yarr, Champiyatong, Lakstang, Langtam and Mazungjami.⁴⁰ The Government of India ordered an expedition beyond Dikhu, led by Porteus, the officiating Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills district, who reached Mongsenyimti on 30th December 1888. After establishing a military post the government successfully punished the offenders. In the meantime, the Sema village of Seromi, across the Dikhu took away ten Longsa heads. Porteus marched against the Seromi village on the 21st of January 1889.

Finally in 1889 the whole of the Ao country was annexed and incorporated in the Naga Hill District. Mokokchung was made a sub divisional headquarters. This marked the beginning of modern administration system in the Ao country. During its inception Mokokchung sub-division consisted of 47 Ao villages, 4 Lotha, 3 Sema, and one Konyak village. In 1892, Longsa the only Ao village across the Dikhu river was merged into the administration. Later in 1957 Mokokchung was made one of the districts of NHTA (Naga Hills Tuensang Area). For administrative convenience Tuensang Division of the then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was merged with the Naga Hills and it was renamed as Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) on 1st December 1957. In 1961 the name of NHTA was changed to Nagaland, and Mokokchung continued to remain as a district with Wokha and Zunheboto as two sub-divisions. Wokha and Zunheboto were made districts only in 1973.

40 Nagaland State Gazetteer, Mokokchung, District, 1979, p.45.

Impact of British Administration

Political history impinges upon social, cultural and even religious life of the people. This is very true in the case of the Ao Nagas whose ancient social-cultural and political fabric was completely turned up side down. British administration brought to an end the isolation of the region and introduced new elements in its political, social and cultural composition.⁴¹

a) Modern System of Administration

During its seventy odd years rule in the Naga Hills (1881-1947) the main concern of the colonial power was to establish law and order among the dozen turbulent Naga tribes. For the first time the whole region was brought within an All India political power outside the area. The changes brought about were much more radical, much more a threat to the traditional way of life. The threat came from two sources, once the strong arm of administration tore down the traditional barriers and defence. One was from the erosion of the traditional socio-political structure, based upon the autonomy of village-states,

41 B.B. Goswami in K.S.Singh, *Tribal Situation*, pp.272-73 speaking on the impact of British rule in the plain areas says "The impact of British rule the consequent political modernisation creates elite groups among the non-tribes who took important lead in socio-cultural, political movements in the valley", p.273 speaking of the hills areas, he notes that "whenever the British took punitive expedition (into the hills) they established outposts. They generally followed the policy of controlling the hill areas by a force of military police garrisoning post in the interior which were largely manned by Nepalis. They were followed by the Bengali, Assamese and Hindi speaking clerks, coolies and explores such as members of Trigonometrical survey of India. To cater the their material needs followed a member of Marwari, Assamese and Bengali traders", p.274.

by the imposition of an alien (British) governing structure. People were now organised into districts and sub-districts, subject to the final authority of the foreigners called deputy commissioners, magistrates, political agents and forest officers etc. Further more, their will was imposed through the presence of an alien army. It was not just that there were new masters; for most hill tribals the novelty lay in the fact that there were masters where previously there had been none.⁴²

British government realized the need for a new administrative system which would suit the Nagá tribes. This was necessary to control them and at the same time to facilitate their acceptance of British authority. In the actual administration, the Ao nagas were left to continue to rule and administer their villages according to their respective customs and traditions with the least possible interference from the government. The bulk of the administration such as judicial cases, whether criminal or civil, were carried on through the tribal people themselves. This technique of administration proved very successful and had lasting effect in the district. According to Piketo Sema, "This technique of administration left the Nagas free to govern themselves in their traditional way while saving the government from the expensive responsibility of detailed administration. In other words the British did not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of the Nagas nor try to administer them according to an European model. In some ways they re-inforced the traditional arrangements

42 Federic Downs, *Christianity in North-East India*, ISPCCK, Delhi, 1983, p.14.

which suited the peculiar conditions of the Naga people and society. Piketo Sema opined "The British rule did not in any way seriously effect the basic social structure of the Nagas, it remained traditional in character and content."⁴³

British administration also led to the creation of Dobasis⁴⁴ post in the district level to assist the government in daily administrative transaction. A two tier system of administration viz the village and the district level was established. The head of their administrative units were the Goanboras⁴⁵ at the village level and the Deputy Commissioner and Sub-Divisional Officer at the district level. Dobasis were elected by the government to act as liaison officers between the government and the village. And in recognition of their service, presented a red blanket which became a permanent initiation after the Naga Hills district was formed in 1881. It held immense social prestige.

Administrative apart, the British rule did not have much influence by way of other developmental work in the Naga Hills.⁴⁶ During this period tea plantation was developed in Assam and within a short span of time Assam emerged as a major tea producing area. However not such planting was developed in the Naga Hills. The colonial rule initiated western education.

43 Piketo Sema, p.55.

44 Debasis, are Naga interpreters who worked for the government.

45 Village Chief.

46 Ghosh, Mokokchung District Gazetteer, p.211.

However from the beginning the school work was entrusted to the missionaries. Bareh has noted that when the missionary efforts in school work had borne fruit "they were emulated by the government which started to open schools and educational institutions."⁴⁷ Reporting on education during the British period Ghosh writes:

During British time not much government attention was paid towards education or any developments works and so progress of education was slow. After independence of India, The Assam government looked into the matter, and some more primary schools were opened, and whenever possible the primary schools, was converted into middle school and the middle schools was converted to High school, in the then Naga Hills as a whole.⁴⁸

Major change in the fabric of Naga society during the British period, however, are to be seen through the introduction of Christianity and education by the American Baptist missionaries. This aspect will be discussed exclusively in the next chapter.

B) Eradication of Head-Hunting and Slavery-

Another impact of the British rule was the eradication of the practice of head-hunting. Head-hunting had social, cultured, religious and political implications for the Nagas. The Aos believed that it could bring prosperity to their villages through abundant foodgrain, fertility, many children and good hunting. A successful head-hunter enjoyed certain social privileges. He was

47 Bareh, Gazetteer of Nagaland, p.191.

48 Ghosh, p.211.

entitled to wear special dress and ornaments and allowed to decorate his house in a special way signifying his special status. There were constant feuds and head taking because of this social importance of head hunting. With the government making head-hunting illegal, peace could be restored among the various tribes and villages. Trade began to pick-up and the people could go anywhere at any time of the year without fear of losing their heads. During this period the practice of slavery was also stopped among the Aos. A resemblance of order was brought into the Ao country after ages of hostility and war. However it also marked the decline of old traditional culture. Morung (learning institution, 'Ariju') which occupies a central position in the life of the Aos, during the glory days of head-hunting soon began to decline, and with it many important socio-cultural practices became extinct.

c) Contact with the Outside World

The Aos' first contact was with the Ahoms in the 13th century. The second contact was with the American Baptist mission in 1872 (Discussed in the next chapter) and lastly with the British administration in 1889.

The first contact with the Ahoms did not lead to any change in the life of the people. The two cultures (Ahom and Naga) remained externally separate. But with the contact of the American missionaries and the British administration which developed side by side in the Naga country, drastic social change could be seen, in the sphere of culture, customs, political and religious

life. Another factor of change during the colonial rule was the participation in the first and Second World Wars. During the First World War (1914-18), the Aos helped the British government in its war efforts and even some 200 Aos joined the labour corps and went to France.⁴⁹ This enormously broadened their world view and mental makeup. It was the beginning of 'Nationalism' among the Naga tribes. In the Second World War the Aos along with British fought against the Japanese invasion of Kohima. Many Aos served as soldiers (Assam Regiments), guide, interpreters and porters during the great war. Another agent of change, was the influx of Bengalis, Nepalese, Assamese, Hindi speaking clerks, and Marwaris into the Naga hills with the advent of British rule. According to Frederic Downs.

One of the reasons for the influence of many of the newcomers and indeed the reason why they came, was that they were experienced at functioning within the type of administration introduced by the British or, to put it differently, they had accommodated themselves to the process of modernization implicit in the administration.⁵⁰

49 Ghosh, Mokokchung District Gazette, p.46.

50 Frederick Downs, *Christianity in North East India*, p.11-12.

CHAPTER III

THE DAWN OF CHRISTIANITY, ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE AO AREAS

Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed a rapid growth of Christianity in Asia. It was a century of missionary zeal and expansion of the church. North East India with its diversities, inaccessibility and problems of communication was no exception. This part of the Indian territory was exposed to the gospel in the early part of the nineteenth century. The Khasi of Meghalaya were the first to hear the gospel in North East India.¹ Among the various tribes of the Naga Hills, the Aos were the first to be brought under the influence of Christian mission in 1872 under the pioneering work of Rev. E.W.Clark and Godhula Brown, an Assamese preacher. The coming of Christianity (American Baptist Foreign Mission) into the Ao country was a remarkable epoch in the life and culture of the Aos. The cross followed the British flag, but this case was however otherwise in the North-East.² Visier Sanyu speaking on this stated, "The conversion of the Nagas to Christianity was a revolution in the Naga

1 P.T.Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland*, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1983, p.46.

2 H.K.Barpujari, *The American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 A.D.)*, Spectrum Publication, Delhi, 1986, p.xi.

history more significant than the British colonization. It was the beginning of all things in Naga history."³

This chapter traces the history of Christianity among the Ao Nagas: its advent, growth, and development from 1870 to 1955. It also studies the various Christian activities namely the establishment of schools and training institutes, literary work, medical and health care.

The Advent of Christianity

From the very beginning the East-India Company sent out Chaplains to India to look after the spiritual welfare of its employees, and subsequently to spread the message of Christ among the Indians. However, towards the close of the eighteenth century when the company became an important political power in India, the authorities in England realised that "in matter of religions the native of India were peculiarly sensitive," and therefore "any interference with the religion of the native would eventually ensure the total destruction of British power"⁴ in India. Henceforth religious neutrality became the watch word of the company.

In the nineteenth century, it was considered absurd "when non-Christian rulers in Asia often gave Missionary permission to preach the gospel in their Kingdom the Christian British should deny this elementary human right to the

3 Visier Sanyu, *Nagas in History, in Nagas 90*, published by Literature Committee, Nagas 90, 1990, p.9.

4 H.H.Dodwell, *Cambridge Modern History*, vi, p.124.

missionary."⁵ Through vigorous agitation led by Wilberforth and others, in collaboration with the church, Missionary Society, the Bible Society etc., in England, could succeed in winning public support for "Christianising India". A new Charter Act was passed in 1813 permitting missionaries to go and reside in India under certain conditions - religious neutrality and non-interference in the religions of Indian subjects.⁶ It was under this background the missionaries from England and America came to India.

When Assam became a part of the British dominion at the close of Burmese war in 1826, the British administration believed that the conversion of tribals to Christianity and spread of education through the missionaries might lead to civilizing the heathen and pacification of certain tribes. The task of so-called "humanising the tribals became mainly the work of the Christian missionaries."

Captain Francis Jenkins, the then Governor General's Agency and Commissioner of Assam, was one such person, who was persuaded by Charles Bruce, a pioneer tea planter, to invite the Baptist Mission in Burma to Sadiya, situated in the North Eastern extremity of Assam.⁷ He found that the Kamptis at Sadiya were not only "a nuisance but treacherous and tricky demon

5 P.Thomas, *Christians and Christianity in India, Pakistan*, p.177.

6 H.K.Barpujari, *op.cit.*, p.xii.

7 *Baptist missionary Magazine*, Mission to the Shans, 1837, pp.19-21. Also see H.K.Barpujari, *American Missionaries*, 1986, p.1.

worshippers as well." He thought that the only thing that would make them better was Christianity.⁸ Proposing to the missionaries he wrote:

No attention of mine should of course be wanting to make the place comfortable to any missionary, and I will be willing to contribute my mite to their establishment. You may mention, that I will subscribe 1000 rupees, if a family is settled as a mission at Sadiya, and who have had a press to work for six months I will be happy to double that sum, if I remain in charge of the province.⁹

He was also willing to grant a plot of land free of rent for fifteen to twenty years for the sake of establishing a Christian colony. The home board accepting his proposal send Rev. and Mrs. Nathan Brown and Rev. and Mrs. O.T.Cutter to Sadiya in 1836, who were the first American missionaries ever to come to Assam. From 1836 to 1840 the Board sent out half a dozen missionaries on what came to be known as the Shan Mission at Sadiya. Later due to Anglo-Singhpo skirmish, the mission was forced to move from Sadiya to Jaipur, in which a good number of British soldiers including some officers were killed in a raid, but fortunately the lives of the missionaries were saved.

While staying in Jaipur Rev. Miles Brownson, an American Baptist missionary came in contact with the Namsang Nagas (now a village in the Tirap Frontier Division of Arunachal Pradesh. Nagas, widely speaking, is a big family spreading all over Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal and Western part of Myanmar) for the first time on 9 January 1839, but was not able to win their

8 A.C.Bower, *Under Head-Hunter's Eyes*, Judson Press, Philadelphia, 1929.

9 B.M.M., 1837, pp.19-21, H.K.Barpujari, op.cit., p.5.

friendship as they were apprehensive of him being a servant of the Company.¹⁰ In 1840 he was able to move to Namsang along with his family and sister Rhoda Brown who joined him in the mission field. But after six months Brownson's evangelical and educational efforts among the Namsang came to a sudden halt because of personal tragedy. Although he still believed that it was possible to work in the hills, other members of the mission did not share his view and prevailed upon him to go to Nowgong which he did in October 1841.¹¹

Although the Namsang work was given up in 1841, the mission still retained some contact with the Nagas. Hube, a Konyak Naga was converted and Baptized by Brown at Sibsagar on 12 September 1847. But he died of cholera shortly after his baptism on 10 October 1847. The second Naga to be baptized was Longjanglepzuk who was also known as Lungsang Francis Wayland, an Ao from Merangkong village. He was baptized by Rev. S.W.Whiting of Sibsagar mission on 7 September 1851. He took up residence at Sibsagar. In the summer of 1853 he went to his village to marry, but while he was there he was killed in the course of the Konyak raid on his village. During the two or three years of his membership at the Sibsagar church, he lived an exemplary life. The third Naga to be baptized was Yahukonsi Sarah Caldwell. She was baptized on 4 January 1852 and became a member of the

10 *Journal of Brownson*, 9 January 1839, see, H.K.Barpujari, op.cit., p.233.

11 F.S.Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1969, pp.20-26.

Nowgong church. Later in 1855, two Konyak men named Aklong Konyak and Amlai Konyak of Namsang were baptized at Sibsagar by Brown.¹² These two men went back to their village and began to preach, but the village elders thought that it might disturb the peace of the village and they were expelled from the village. Up to this time the Christian work among the Nagas did not show much progress and the mission also did not undertake any systematic work among the Nagas until 1871.¹³

The early missionaries in Assam had been invited by the local authorities for reasons of their own. From time to time the missionaries expressed displeasure with the authorities for siding with the people. Most colonial administrator and scholars like J.P.Mills and J.H.Hutton were of the view that the role of the Baptist mission among the tribals in general, and Nagas in particular, had been injurious and destructive to their culture. On the other hand the missionaries accused them of siding with the indigenous faith against the Baptist mission. The rivalry persisted throughout the period of the study.

Mission to the Ao Nagas

The mission among the Nagas was resumed by Godhula Brown and Rev. E.W.Clark. Rev. E.W. Clark born in North-East New York and a graduate of the Brown University, was trained in Missiology at Newton and Rochester

12 L.L.Yaden, *Nagaland*, New Laxmi Press, New Delhi, 1970, p.54.

13 Miltons Sangma, *History of American Baptist Missions in North-East India (1836-1950)*, vol.1, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1987, pp.220-21.

theological seminaries. He, along with his wife Mary reached Sibsagar, Assam, in June 1869 to take charge of the Church and the printing press after the departure of William War. But soon the initial enthusiasm for the Assamese field disappeared. In 1873 taking a quick glance at the work done in the Assam plains for the previous thirty seven years. Clark himself had realized that there had been only a hundred converts until then. It meant three converts per year a station (Guwahati, Nowgong and Sibsagar). Besides, even these converts were "doing next to nothing to make their church self-supporting, but living on the mission what they can, and apparently the better pleased the more money they can get out of the mission."¹⁴

As his zeal for the Assamese slowly diminished, there arose in its place a growing fascination for the hill tribes, especially the Nagas. In 1873, Clark also learned "from a recent and carefully prepared statistical report of the converts in India, that the number of native converts of all denominations had more than doubled in the decade between 1861-1871; and that the increase had been mainly among the aboriginal hill tribes."¹⁵ For Clark these reasons were further confirmed by the good harvest that was being reaped at that time among the Garos, the Khasis and the Karen.

14 E.W.Clark to John N.Murdock, 10 April 1873, Box 40 GR 1, American baptist Historical Society Archives, Rochester, New York, as quoted in Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*, Vendrame Missiological Institute, Shillong, 1984, p.58.

15 Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission...*", p.58.

Clark was so optimistic about the prospect of evangelical success among the Aos that he wrote to the homeboard:

We are willing to give our whole strength to labour alone, if need be, but we cannot distribute ourselves to many places beyond, where we believe the standards of Emmanuel should be planted and sustained, we want a man for these Nagas, upon whose mountain homes our ages daily rest. They have some crude and indefinite conceptions of a great spirit, and evil one, further than this they have no religion. Our heart goes after them, our prayer ascend for them and a petition comes to you in this behalf.¹⁶

But his petition was met with cold response from the home board smarting from the failure of Shan and Namsang mission. Even the government refused to assure him protection since the Naga hills was still under the excluded and unadministered area.

Expressing his determination to take up evangelical work among the Aos at any cost, Clark wrote to John N. Murdock, Secretary to the Board on 10 April 1873 and 4 August 1873,

After weeks of consultation with my wife, I have come about the conclusion that if the Union persist in thus hampering of the preaching of gospel. I had better religion and preach in the region beyond without any aid of the Union. Again if to save this Naga work it shall become necessary for me to relinquish my connection with the Union. I shall not hesitate. I have given you to notice. I cannot see such a great opening as that badly damaged.¹⁷

16 A.C.Sinha, "Christianity and Ethnic Identity Among the Nagas", p.147, in Miri Mirinal, ed., *Continuity and Change in Tribal Society*, Indian Institute of Advance Studies, Simla, 1993.

17 Joseph Puthenpurakal, op.cit., p.57.

Finally, E.W.Clark left for Dekahaimong (Molung Yimchen) village on 2 March 1876 to live there. The first contact with Dekahaimong village was on 1870 when E.W.Clark and Godhula Brown came in contact with Supongmeren, an Ao Naga from that village, who had come to Sibsagar for barter trade. After a short stay with Godhula, an Assamese preacher and teacher, he met Clark in 1871. Induced by Clark, Godhula adopted to acquire the language from Supongmeren,¹⁸ with whom he went to Dikahaimong village in the later part of 1871 Rivenburg notes, "Godhula was in the prime of life and possessed a good degree of fact and Christian zeal."¹⁹

He left Sibsagar along with his wife to Dekahaimong village on 6 April 1872, and in the following November returned to Sibsagar with a Company of Nagas for Baptism. Nine men related their Christian experience before the church and were baptized. On their return to the village they built a small chapel. In the subsequent month (December, 1872) Rev.E.W.Clark went with

18 According to Khristan Walunir (Christian Warrior) Supongmeren was the first Naga who played a keynote in bridging the gap between the Clark and the headquarters for the cause for the gospel. Moreover (1) He was the first Naga tutor to Clark and Godhula. (2) He was the first Naga who made a map of the Dekahaimong village on the sand before Clark and Godhula, explaining the nature of the topography and the location of the village, how the Naga homes were built. (3) He was the first man to hear the Gospel of Christ, baptized in 1871, and became the spokesman on behalf of Godhula and Clark. (4) First person to help in the production of Ao Nagas Literature Composition of hymns and the translation of the Lord's prayer into Ao dialect. Writing on him Rev Kijung Ao said, "He was not only an interpreter between Clark and the Nagas, but he was a teacher of Ao language and an intermediary between Clark and the Nagas to bring the gospel to the Nagas." See N. Toshi, *Mission to the Nagas, Tryst with the AO*, Radha Offset Printers, Sivakasi, 1995, p.77.

19 Rev. S.W. Rivenburg, *Historical Sketch of the Ao Naga Mission*, Jubilee Conference, 1886.

Godhula and another member of the Sibsagar church to Dekahaimong and fifteen more men related the Christian experience and were accepted and baptized on 23 December. This was the first baptismal service ever held in Nagaland, which marks the humble beginnings of the Naga Church.²⁰ It was on 2 March 1876 that Rev. E.W.Clark finally left the Assam field for Dekahaimong village to begin Molung Mission (precursor of mission activities in Nagaland). On 19 August 1876, the nine Ao Nagas baptized at Sibsagar were dismissed from the church to unite with the Naga church in the hills. In early March 1878, he was joined by Mrs. Clark, his wife. She kept a school for the girls.²¹

A people's movement towards Christ began when these two groups of believers from the Ao tribe propelled this faith: people started coming forward for baptism and public witnessing and by 1871 there were only 1102 non-Christian among the Aos. Out of the total population of 59,859, the Baptist Christian consisted of 58,757 (see chart). As P.T.Philip stated, "This 'people movement', 'group movement', 'village movement', or 'tribal movement' among the Aos paved the way for further expansion of Christianity in Nagaland."²²

20 P.T.Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland*, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1976, p.54.

21 Rev. S.W.Rivenburg, Jubilee Conference, 1866.

22 P.T.Philip, *op.cit.*, p.54.

Molung Mission

"Some three hours march away was a good village site, occupied years ago by a people which had been destroyed and scattered through repeated wars. Dekahaimong hid for years considered a removed to this Molung Crest, so rich in promise of abundant harvests, and now the adherents of the new faith, presented at home, determined to put into exemption the long mooted project."²³

The Christians and the missionary finally moved to the uninhabited hills, on 24 October 1876, to establish a new village where peace and spirit of Christianity could prevail. This village was named as Molungyimchen (New Molung). However, the founding of a new village was not free from trouble. According to Ao Naga tradition, the founding of a new village demands a sacrifice of cattle to the great village deity. They had not fulfilled this requirement. This was considered a declaration of war against their old faith. Consequently, a threat came from the old village to exterminate the new village. The Christians replied that the new village very earnestly desired to live in peace and amity with all others, and requested them that they too become Christ friends and not his foes. Most earnest was the prayer at Molung. Unexpectedly, a peaceful message was sent to the Christians at

23 M.M.Clark, *A Corner in India*, American Baptist Publication, Philadelphia, 1907, p.19.

Molung, and the Christians were full of praises to God for their deliverance.²⁴

In March, 1875 two school were started in Mupongchukit, but had to be closed down due to lack of funds. On her return from America Mrs. Clark started a girls' school in Molung. In 1879, Zilli, an Assamese researcher and his wife also joined the Molung Mission. Early in the year 1881, Godhula was ordained and went with his wife to Merangkong (Nowgong) to found a new station. He was able to baptize seven persons after a few months. In May 1883, David was sent to work among Killingmen villagers who were then living at Bura Heimong Village (Yimchenkimong). In November 1884, the teacher and a greater part of Killingmen was removed to Assangma, where a school has since been maintained. Several seemed to have professed Christianity but there was no baptism.

The Molung Mission was further re-inforced by the arrival of Rev. S.W. Rivenburg and his wife on 8 January 1885. They soon began to learn the Ao language. In May 1885 Rev. E.W. Clark left Molung for America after a stay in Assam for seventeen years, nine of which were spend in the Naga hills. During this time, the language was mastered and written, a dictionary compiled, Primer, Catechism, Life of Joseph, a Hymn book and the Gospel of Matthew and John, were carried through the press, besides carrying out the work of a missionary. In July 1885, Zilli visited Lyrmen, a village, a day's

24 Ibid, p.23.

march from Molung, where the people heard the gospel for the first time. They came to Molung entreating for a teacher that they might learn more and have their children taught. Robi remained with them from October 1885 till April 1886 during which two men were converted but they had not asked for baptism. During October and November 1885, eight men who had formerly resided at Molung came back and asked for baptism and thus a new interest started in Yazang village. But then they had no teacher or preacher to guide them.²⁵

In April 1886, Godhula not only left the mission work but also Christianity. Dr. Joseph Puthenpurakal commenting on it remarked:

It is doubtful whether the Baptist movement would have spread into the Naga hills in the second half of the nineteenth century without the part played by Godhula. His merit lies in having opened the way to the Nagas for Clark. His many defeats and shortcomings should be forgiven and forgotten when we realize, that he was God's instrument in introducing Christ's name to the Naga people.²⁶

At this time according to the jubilee reports, 1886, there were 54 Christians at Molung.²⁷

According to 1889 reports, there were 74 members in the Ao church, but no ordained priest yet on this field. By April 1889, the Ao tribe was formally annexed to the British Dominion of India, and was made the sub-division of the

25 Rev. S.W.Rivenburg, Jubilee Conference...1886, op.cit.

26 Joseph Puthenpurakal, op.cit., p.69.

27 S.W.Rivenburg, op.cit.

Naga hills District with a Residing officer in charge. In 1893 a new Church was formed in one village and the total membership of the Ao church increased to 74, yet there was no ordained local preacher in the Ao mission.²⁸

Impur Mission

With the coming of Rev. and Mrs.Perrine (1892) and the Rev. and Mrs.F.A.Haggard (1893) to join at Molung, it had become necessary to find a more suitable place to accommodate the missionaries who had already arrived, and for possible future expansion of the Mission work. Impur was decided as the new site of the mission which lies between two large villages, Mopungchukit and Sungratsu, about forty miles from Molung and ten miles from Mokokchung. The newly selected site was more suitable, being located, in the heart of the Ao country, it became a launching pad for furtherance of the Gospel among the Aos and the neighbouring tribes. Mr.Haggard and family moved to Impur on November 1894 and Mr. and Mrs.Perrine with the Drings arrived at Impur on 1 December 1894. But Clark remained at Molung "partly because trained pundits were available at Molung for the compiling of an Ao English dictionary, and partly for rendering some assistance to the Assamese preacher in trying to revive the Church here."²⁹

28 E.W.Clark, Report from Amguri, 3rd Triennial Conference January 14-22, 1893, as quoted in M. Sangma, *History of America Baptist Mission in N.E. India, 1836-1950*, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1987, p.229.

29 83rd Annual Report of American Baptist Foreign Mission as quoted in P.T.Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland*, p.59.

At Impur, the Ao church defined its position on problems of religious practices, drinking, eating opium, marriage relationship, observance of Sundays and going to the church work. The church took a bold step to keep evil out of it regardless of its effect on individual. Because of this action the work came to a stand still as the Christians could not walk as fast nor as far as the covenant required. The following year 1895, the church statistic showed

| | |
|------------|--------------------------|
| Dekhaimong | 13 members |
| Yazang | 7 members |
| Wamakun | 3 members |
| Merangkong | 5 members |
| Molung | 40 members |
| Total | 68 members ³⁰ |

Due to the new strict regulation of the church the membership dwindled at Molung. But revival (Mass conversion due to personal conviction) came in an unexpected way. A young man, Caleph, who had been refused admission into the Molung Church on account of his opium eating habit, under went a deep religious experience and converted one of his friends, Binny, an Assamese who was a resident of Molung in 1875.³¹ These two went to work and won a large number of other people. They formed a religious society of the strictest order, they were soon accepted back into the church and their preaching speeded up a revival movement which rapidly spread beyond Molung to

30 Milton Sangma, op.cit., p.230.

31 F.S.Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, Christian Literature Centre, Guwahati, 1969, p.126.

neighbouring villages. The revival movement was so great that the Aos decided to organise an Association. Thus in 1879, the first Association of the Ao churches was formed.

The History of Ao Baptist Association: Its Growth and Development

The first meeting of the Ao Baptist Association, the precursor of the present Baptist Arogo Mungdang (ABAM), was held at Molung on 12-13 March 1897. The primary concerns stated on the programme of the Association meeting was Prayer, Evangelization, the Holy Spirit, Christian benevolence, should the Nagas bury their dead? Should all Christians learn to read? By what change in food, house sanitation and clothing should Christians better their mode of living?³²

After disbanding the Molung church, a new church was organised at Impur on 18 November 1897. It was thoroughly reorganised and reoriented, defining its petition on problems of old religious practices, marriages, opium eating and drinking.

By the end of 1897 the Ao Naga church consisted of 70 communicants and 335 adherents, with two self-supporting churches and 11 regular meeting places. The year 1889 was a year of reaping and rejoicing. Four new church was added, making six self-supporting churches. 104 people were baptized in

32 H.M.Clark, *op.cit.*, p.143.

that year. The membership grew to 177 and the adherents to 500 with 7 lay preachers, and one ordered minister.

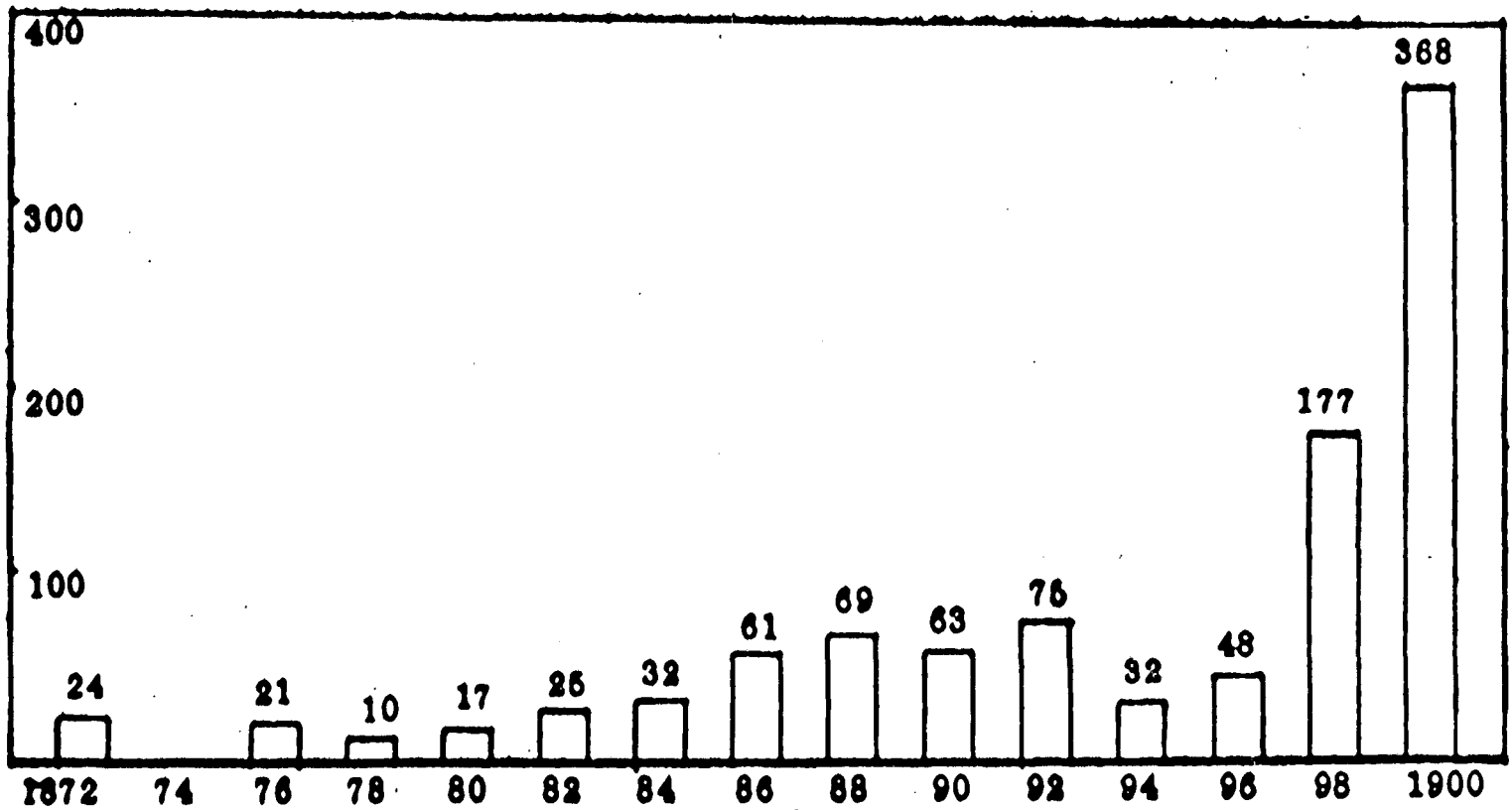
In December 1889, Mr. and Mrs. Perrine left for America and Rivenburg moved to Impur to joint Clark on February 1900. The sincerity and faithfulness of the native workers paved the way for the success of the Ao church. Membership grew to 368 by that year.³³ When Clark left for America in 1901, Rivenburg took the entire responsibility of the mission. He was enforced by the coming of Mr. and Mrs. W.F.Downs, who took to studying Ao language, teaching music and English in the school. Membership multiplied year after year, a large number of which came from the school. Schools were the evangelizing agencies and the teachers also served as evangelists and pastors for the villages in which they were working. Clark reported: "Through the schools, the Gospel is made to reach the mountaineers more rapidly and permanently than any other means."³⁴

In 1904 English replaced Assamese as the second language. And by the year 1905 there were 24 schools and 420 pupils of which the government took over 14 schools in 1906. In 1905, twenty villages had turned to Christianity in the Ao territory, and the Church membership grew to 685 with 195 baptisms.³⁵

33 S.W.Rivenburg, op.cit..

34 8th Session Missionary Conference, 1904-1905, p.58.

35 J.E.Orr, *Evangelical Awakening in India*, Masili Sahitya Santha, New Delhi, 1970, p.69.



As Church Membership 1872-1900

Chart 1

In the following years the progress of Christianity was followed by persecution, and the highest opposition came from the custodians of traditional Ao customs, particularly the sungratsu and Mopungchuket village. In 1905 they tried to compel the Christian minority to observe all the non-Christian festivals and taboos and pay for the expenses of all the religious ceremonies of the village. Although the Deputy Commission eventually issued an order declaring "liberty of conscience to all and thus relieving the Christian from the payment of village taxes for false worship and for the entertainment of visitor",³⁶ the tirade continued. The Christians felt that the local government officials were their worst enemy, because of its antipathy to them and for overlooking the fault of the Dobhasis (interpreters), in depriving them of justice and fairness in court proceedings. The Christians also considered the governing officials as their enemy; for ignoring the action taken by the village headman in warranting a fine for refusing to attend the Sunday market at Mokokchung; for having taken out four boys from the Impur Schools when the examinations were on; for finding them for refusing to take the heathen form of oath; and for not taking action on their appeal for complete exemption from all obligations to the religious customs of heathen.³⁷ Despite the obstacles the Gospel found its way beyond the Ao territories to Lotha and Sema county. Miss E.G. Miller served from 1906-1907. Mr. and Mrs. Longwell came in

36 W.F.Dowd, Report from Impur Field, Guwahati, 5-12 January 1907.

37 R.B.Longwell, Report from Impur Field, Guwahati, 4-13 January 1913. Also see Milton Sangma History of American Baptist in N.E. India, p.234.

1906. Dr. and Miss J.R.Bailey joined the Impur Mission on 13 December

1910. And Mr. and Mrs. Smith took charge of the station school in 1912.³⁸

At the juncture Rev. E.W.Clark the pioneer missionary retired from the field in 1911, after 42 years of service in the North-East of India, of which 35 years were spend among the Ao Nagas.³⁹ Despite his departure who more than any other contributed to the development of Ao churches, the movement continued to grow. In 1913-14 there was a third major revival⁴⁰ among the Aos leading to a healthy growth of evangelistic work: from 12700 total membership in 1915 it increased to 3,838 in 1920. There were 46 churches and schools in 38 villages and four missionaries were in the field by this time.⁴¹

In 1922 more than 3,000 christians gathered to celebrate the golden jubilee of Clark's foundation of Molung centre. There were then churches in 52 of the 58 Ao villages. The translation of the New Testament was completed

38 P.T.Philip, op.cit., p.119.

39 F.S.Downs, op.cit, p.119.

40 The Ao Baptist Church witnessed spectacular growth within a century (1871-1972). From 24 in 1872 to 368 in 1900, 8973 in 1926, 16,680 in 1950. It grew to 58,757 Christians out of the 59,859 population in 1971. Down S.Puthenpurakal, Philip, Longkumer identify various reasons for the growth. F.S.Downs identify three revival movements among the Aos. 1895, 1910 and 1914-15 for the growth. See A.C.Sinha "Christianity and Ethnic Identity among the Nagas", in R.S. Mann, ed., *Tribes of India, on Going Challenges*, M.D. Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p.147. Revival derived from Latin word 'Revivere' means to live again "Webster's Dictionary defines revival as to bring back to life" or to come back to life. According to Charles G. Finny matters, through the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit of God.

41 P.T.Philip, op.cit., p.73.

in 1929 and some school lessons and textbooks for the schools were also prepared and printed. By 1930, the Ao church had become almost entirely self-supporting under able leadership. The Christian numbered, 8112 in 1930 and 9,000 in 1933.⁴² The Ao churches during the phase did some effective work among the neighbouring tribes of Sangtam, Konyak, Chang and Semas. Tanquist was prophetic in saying that the Ao field was destined to become an outstanding example in Assam. It was able and willing to take more and more responsibility in education, evangelism and medical mission.⁴³

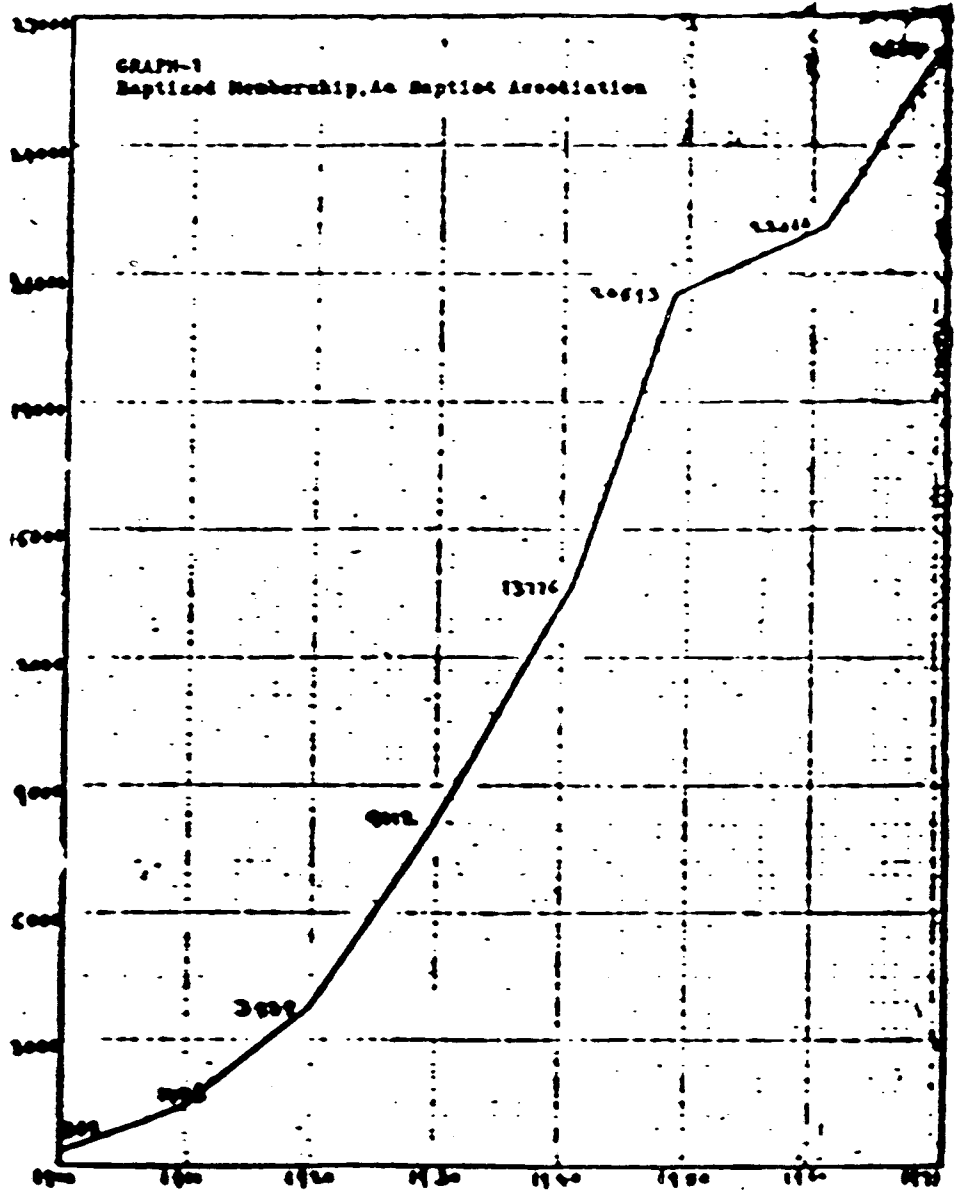
In 1938 there were 69 churches with 11,657 membership and 893 baptism during the year. However, in 1940, the church faced difficult situation when one Mayangnokcha Ao, an outstanding Christian leader who served as the headmaster of Impur school for 14 years, left government service. Others who followed suit were Subongmeiba, Panger and Kumbo (Milton-Sangma 238). Despite of these setbacks the Church grew stronger and stronger. The estimated membership of 1941 was 13,776 (see graph.). Baptism count mounted up to 1,300 in 1945 alone and the membership was reported as 17,000 in 1946, with contribution in cash for the year amounting to Rs.105,375.⁴⁴ Downs made an interesting observation that "as early as 1917 the missionaries

42 Ibid, p.75.

43 33rd Missionary Conference Report 1936-42.

44 B.I.Anderson, Missionary Conference, Guwahati, 6-10 December 1946.

Graph 1



were worrying about the fact that many Churches had more money than they knew what to do.⁴⁵

In 1947 the Ao baptist Association celebrated the Golden Jubilee. 11,295 delegates from 58 churches registered for the Jubilee celebration. The membership of the church was reported to be 15,734 and 20,593 in 1949. During this time they also found an in-charge for baptized members among the Konyaks and Changs who were still a part of the Ao Association. By 1950, the Ao church had completed the New Testament (Bible) printing and raised the Impur M.E. school to High School. There were altogether 1,166 Ao Naga Baptized during that year and the total church membership was 17,000. Total collection of the year was Rs.55,000 and 57,000 Yimchin of rice.⁴⁶

The last missionary among the Aos was A.S.Truxton who left Impur school station and Nagaland in 1954 on government order due to unstable political situation. The departure of Delanos in 1955 marked the end of Foreign Missionary activities in Nagaland. Despite the insurgency problem the baptized member for the year 1956 stood at 1,234 and 2,500 in 1958. By 1961, the Christian Community was reported to be 51,520 out of the total population of 53,576. And according to 1971 church reports there were only 1102 non-Christians among the Aos out of a population of 59,859.⁴⁷

45 F.S.Downs, *The Mighty Works of God*, op.cit., p.122.

46 G.E.Hunter, *Mission Conference*, Jorhat, 11-14 January 1949.

47 P.T.Philip, op.cit., p.30.

Christian Institutions

Rev. M.C.Mason, commenting on the methods of mission work to be employed among the hill tribals, stated during the Jubilee Conference 1866: "Nearly every one of us is so situated that we cannot confine ourselves to any department of work. We cannot be limited to one or two methods of work. We are each obliged to attend to various departments, translating, writing, publishing, printing, theological teaching, management of schools, preaching, touring and a host of minor duties, all fall upon the same missionary."⁴⁸

This statement more or less summarises the various Christian activities among the Naga tribes. The Christian activities or institutions among the Ao Nagas can be studied under three broad headings (i) Evangelical activities (ii) Education institutions and (iii) Medical works.

1. Evangelical Activities

Before mentioning the evangelical activities of the Christian missionaries it is important to understand the Christian concept of what they meant by "evangelical" or "evangelization". According to the Oxford dictionary "Evangelical" denotes (i) the teaching of the gospel or the Christian religion; (ii) (in the church of England) of a group believing that salvation is achieved by faith in the "proclamation of the gospel." The "Gospel" is the good news, that salvation can be found in the person of Jesus Christ, The Son of God, who

48 Rev. M.C.Mason, Jubilee Conference 1866.

came to earth as an atoning sacrifice, to redeem mankind from their sins, and give them eternal life. According to Dr. Joseph Puthenpurakal: "It would mean a variety of activities: saving souls, preaching the Gospel, administering baptism, and the other sacraments, planning the church, dialogue, presence, everything else that can help to bring about a 'renewal of humanity' in the view of God's kingdom and His glory." And evangelization means the winning of people to the Christian faith through the written and spoken word and personal invitations, other activities (medical work, social concern, educations, etc.) are meant to serve this most important goal or are peripheral to it.⁴⁹

The main objective of the Christian missionaries from the beginning was to spread the Gospel, 'the message of God's Love. Clark came to Assam and the Naga hills as a missionary of the ABMU (American Baptist Missionary Union) and was convinced that the only object which gave right to the existence of missionary unions was "to carry the gospel to those who have not heard it."⁵⁰ To E.W. Clark goes the credit for bringing the Christian religion to the Nagas in the face of opposition, when the government refused him permission to enter the Naga country, and the homeboard grew reluctant to allow him to evangelize the turbulent Nagas. He wrote to the home board on 21 July 1871: "Surely we cannot but see those mountains and the people living up there, who do not know Christ, we cannot open our eyes without thinking of about them.

49 Joseph Puthenpurakal, *op.cit.*, p.8.

50 Ibid, p.76.

The river (Dikhu) which flows down from the hills and passes through our compound, reminds us that they are dying without Christ... we look out day after day beyond the villages across the paddy fields, with the mountains towering in silent grandeur against the southern sky as if watching for the feel of him who lovingeth good tidings that published peace."⁵¹

This evangelistic zeal was echoed by Mason during the Jubilee Conference, "Go ye into the all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Matthew 28:19) is the first and great command of Him who hath send us. This shows that the proclamation of the gospel; the declaration of the good news of Salvation must be our first and chief aim."⁵²

With the establishment of the first church in Dekahaimong Village in 1872, after some stiff opposition from the custodians of old traditional culture, Clark went and settled there permanently along with his wife on February 9, 1876. In 1876 a new station was formed at Impur and by 1897, the Aos formed their own Association, which was self-sufficient, self-reliant and self-growing. The Christian activities increased year after year and by 1960s, the Ao Christian population was 51,520 out of 53,578. The tremendous growth of Christianity among the Aos could not have had been possible without the various evangelistic activities organised by the missionary among the students in village schools and boardings: Baptist Youth Fellowship, Christian

51 N.Toshi, *Mission to the Nagas*, p.71.

52 M.C.Mason, Jubilee Conference 1866.

Endeavour societies, Christian Life Crusades, Student Conferences, touring of villages under Gospel teams, Scripture classes, and the student work started under the aegis of Ao Association in Mokokchung became a model for other areas.⁵³

The first priority of E.W.Clark and the others had always been, simple gospel preaching and the administration of the ordinance of baptism. H.K.Barpujari opined: "An unbiased and impartial observer cannot but admit that these missionaries were the only foreigners who landed in India with no other motives than the spread of the Gospel."⁵⁴

2. Educational Institutions

From the beginning educational activity was one of the main tasks of the missionary to impart Christian education among the Nagas. These schools were known as the mission schools. The primary objective was to spread the teachings of Christian religion. In January 1894, Perrine wrote to the Missionary Union, "At present there is no part of our work that is so important to the success of our work as these schools."⁵⁵ The reason why the Mission

53 Joseph Puthenpurakal, op.cit., pp.141-2.

54 H.K.Barpujari, *The American Missionaries and N.E. India*, p.vii.

55 Joseph Puthenpurakal, op.cit., p.111.

opened three schools in the church was that they saw in them an ideal way to propagate the good news and indoctrinate the people.⁵⁶

For Clark, the school served the dual purpose of preaching the gospel as well as training the best students of the village, upon admission to higher class to become teachers and preachers. The importance given to education as a means of propagating the gospel is also evident from Rivenburg's letter to John N. Murdock dated 8 June 1886 as referred to by Joseph in his book *Baptist Mission in Nagaland*.

I believe there is an immense amount of nonsense talked about Christianising heathen savages, at least without giving them secular school work. In fact I don't intend to do it. As soon as I can I desire to give my whole of my time to preaching. But someone must teach school and make books or our work will be transitory or vain.⁵⁷

The first formal school was opened in 1878 under Mrs. Clark in Dekahaimong village. The second school was started in 1880 at Merangkong village under Godhula and M.D. Burnath. In 1883 May, David was sent to work among Killingmen village, and in 1855 Zilli was sent to Lyrmen village. It was reported that the number of day schools was five with 57 pupils in 1887; in 1888, seven schools with 180 pupils, and in 1889, 9 schools with 200 pupils.⁵⁸ When the Mission was shifted to Impur in 1894, a training school was established with the dual role of imparting Bible teachings and general

56 Mar Atsongchanger, *Christianity and Social Change*, p.32.

57 Joseph Puthenpurakal, *op.cit.*, p.78.

58 Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission, vol.II*, p.191.

education. Till 1949, Impur was the centre of education in the Ao areas. In 1950, the decision was taken to upgrade the Impur middle English school to High School, which had an enrolment of 253 pupils. It included the border tribes as well as the Aos.⁵⁹

Though it is a fact that Christian missionaries laid the foundation of educational development in Nagaland, scholars have often criticized them for not having any curriculum worthy of its name besides Bible text in the schools and for not taking any concrete measure to establish technical schools to impart technical know-how. This was partly to do with their lack of finance to provide such higher education, and their view that it was within the purview of the state, their responsibility not the task of missionaries. Despite their shortcomings one cannot help but appreciate that "the early missionaries irrespective of the difficult circumstances to which they were placed, carried out their education project, with great zeal by showing examples of devotion and sacrifice."⁶⁰ They were able to kindle interest in education among the Nagas. And wherever they founded a church in the Ao country they also established a school and carried evangelism and education side by side.

Throughout its period of administration, the government considered educational activity the sole responsibility of the Christian missionaries. It was only when the mission schools succeeded that the government decided to

59 Ibid, p.200.

60 Alemchiba Ao, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, p.158.

venture into this area. Out of 24 mission schools in 1905, the government took 12 under its direct control. They "saw the necessity of starting their own school partly for the purpose of offering secular education for the Naga children, and mainly for drawing men from them for employment in their various department."⁶¹

Only after the independence of India, the government took education more seriously and wherever it was necessary and possible a primary school was opened. Later due to great demand more primary schools were opened in each village and some were upgraded to upper primary and high schools.

For years the Impur school (present name: Clark Memorial High School) has played a significant role in the development of both general and secular education in the Ao areas as well as in Nagaland. One of its former student, Hokishe Sema, the then Chief Minister of Nagaland, in the Platinum Jubilee celebration in 1970 commended: "Impur mission school is not merely a school, it is an Institution which changed the entire course of our culture and customs. It lit a torch which enlightened the dark crags of Naga Hills and brought rays of modern and new life to our hamlets and removed the grimness of social environment. It produced leaders of thought and action who brought a revolution to our isolated villages. It produced men of intellectual and humanity who brought the message of love and tolerance, truth and devotion. It unites us into community and instills a sense of pride and self-respect. In

61 Ibid, p.157.

other words, Impur mission school occupies a place of honour in our history and the forerunner of modern Nagaland."⁶²

Literary Work

When Clark first came to Sibsagar in 1869 as the Superintendent of the Mission Press, he realized that the gospel would not be preached among the Nagas unless the missionaries learnt the local language, and reduced it to writing. This was of great help when the government decided to replace Assamese alphabets and use the Roman alphabets in 1904. Clark observed that "The Roman scripts made it easier for the people the acquisition of English, and for the missionary it meant that he needed to learn only the language of the people among whom he worked and not another Indian language from which the alphabets were taken."⁶³ Through their relentless efforts the missionaries did much pioneering work in the field of language among the Nagas.

Clark reduced (Chongli) Ao to writing; Rivenburg worked on the same and then had to pick up also Angami; Miss Narola, Rivenburg's daughter, learned Angami; the Witters started with organizing the Lotha language, Perrine besides learning Ao, worked on Semas and Lothas; Tanquist studied angami and attempted also Rengma, Sema, and Lotha; Dowd and Longwell learned Ao; the Dicksons started with Sema, hoping to work among the Semas; and the Houstons studied Lotha; while Anderson and Delano tried to master Sema.⁶⁴

62 Hokishe Sema, "Message", The Platinum Jubilee 1895-1970, Clark Memorial Institute, Impur, Nagaland, 1970, p.7.

63 Joseph Puthenpurakal, *op.cit.*, p.30.

64 *Ibid*, pp.140-41.

Clark did pioneering literary work among the Ao Nagas. Below is a summary of them:

| Year | Title |
|------|---|
| 1877 | Ao Naga primer No.I. |
| 1878 | Naga Catechism. |
| 1882 | The Gospel of Mathew |
| 1883 | Naga Catechism, revised ed., Naga Hymn books, compiled ed. |
| 1884 | The Gospel of John (part), The life of Joseph. |
| 1893 | Ao Naga Grammar with illustrative phrases and vocabulary, Shillong: Assam secretariat press.* Naga Hymn book, revised ed. A translation of J.A.Broadus the Catechism of Bible teaching |
| 1900 | (Philadelphia, The American Publication Society/Nashville, Sunday School Board of Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.), Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press. The Gospel of Mathew and John, revised ed. Life of Joseph, revised ed. Ao Naga Dictionary, Calcutta: Baptist Mission press.* |
| 1905 | |
| 1911 | |

*Prepared in collaboration with Mrs. Clark.

Given below are a list of contribution made by other American Baptist missionaries in the AO areas:

S.W.Rivenburg, 1905, The Acts of the Apostles.

S.A.Perrine, 1905, An Ao Primer (with Pundit Beni Kanour) Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press.

An Arithmetic in Mozunger Naga in MSS.

Second Arithmetic in Ao Naga, Calcutta: Baptist
Mission press.

W.F.Dowd, 1905, The Gospel of Mark
 I Corinthians
 II Corinthians

Longwell, 1929, Completed the Ao New Testament.

Medical Work

Clark had foreseen the great utility of medical works when it made them acceptable among the natives. He realised this as early as 1873 and asked the ABMU executives committee to grant him some allowance for medicine.⁶⁵ From 1881 onwards Clark wrote to the home board that they should not only pay attention to medical mission but also suggested that a potential missionary should take some medical course along with theological studies. However his first priority was gospel preaching. Let the main thing insisted be preaching the Gospel, not doctoring the body.⁶⁶ In response to this Dr. S.W.Rivenburg came to Molung in 1885 but he had to leave for Kohima. The first medical missionary among the Aos was W.A.Loop, and after a short stay

65 Puthenpurakal reported that in 1874, Clark asked his committee in America to grant him some allowance for a small stock of medicine and requested them to send him a box of Perry Davis painkiller and Jayens medicine for the first time he included Rs.75 for medicine in 1878 and added his reason saying the success in God, in treating the sick has been of very great service in mission work.

66 Joseph Puthenpurakal, op.cit., p.84.

of three years he was replaced by J.R. Bailey on 12 December 1910. His eighteen years stay in Impur produced outstanding medical service. "In the first year of his stay at Impur he handled over 3000 cases in the Impur dispensary. Throughout his stay, an average of 2,500 outpatients were cared for annually. A report of Dr.Bailey in 1914 gives us a glimpse of medical work among the Nagas."

About 100 in-patients cared for; about 5000 outpatients, 1000 free treatments given (to) Impur school boys. Something over 200 sick calls were made throughout the district, 50 minor operations were performed, and a total of over 7000 treatments were given. To do this work many hundreds of miles had to be travelled on pony and when paths were too steep, on foot. Many times I have sat down to rest, thinking that my last ounce of strength had been used up, only to renew the climb in a few minutes, up and on till the village was reached, and there to meeting, sell medicine, visit sick and then to bed about mid-night tired and weary. Yet conscious of being spend in the masters service.⁶⁷

After the demise of Dr.Bailey an 8 December 1928. Impur station did not revive any medical missionary for long and it was looked after by the compounders and nurses. Before any concrete steps could be taken by ABMU the missionaries had to leave the Naga Hills in 1955.

67 Ibid, p.114.

Chronology of Missionary Service

| S.No. | District | Year |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Impur (Ao) | | |
| 1. | E.W.Clark, and Mrs.Clark | 1876-1911 |
| 2. | S.W.Rivenburg and Mrs.Rivenburg | 1885-1889 |
| 3. | S.A.Perrine, and Mrs.Perrine | 1892-1905 |
| 4. | F.A.Haggard, and Mrs.Haggard | 1893-1899 |
| 5. | W.F.Dowd, and Mrs.Dowd | 1900-1920 |
| 6. | W.A.Loops, and Mrs.Loops | 1905-1909 |
| 7. | Miss E.G.Miller | 1906-1907 |
| 8. | R.B.Longwell, and Mrs.Longwell | 1906-1927 |
| 9. | J.R.Bailey, and Mrs.Bailey | 1910-1928 |
| 10. | W.M.Smith, and Mrs.Smith | 1912-1915 |
| 11. | Miss E.M.Stevenson | 1918-1931 |
| 12. | Miss E.Masales | 1919-1930 |
| 13. | Miss E.M.Stever | 1920-1923 |
| 14. | Miss A.Geisenhener | 1923-1925 |
| 15. | R.R.Wickstrand, and Mrs.Wickstrand | 1929-1933 |
| 16. | B.I.Anderson and Mrs.Anderson | 1936-1948 |
| 17. | C.E.Hunter, and Mrs.Hunter | 1948-1950 |
| 18. | A.S.Truxton, and Mrs.Truxton | 1952-1954 |
| Kohima (Angami) | | |
| 1. | C.D.King, and Mrs.King | 1879-1886 |
| 2. | S.W.Rivenburg, and Mrs.Rivenburg | 1887-1923 |
| 3. | H.B.Dickson, and Mrs.Dickson | 1906-1908 |
| 4. | Miss Narola Rivenburg | 1908-1910 |
| 5. | J.E.Tanquist, and Mrs.Tanquist | 1913-1947 |
| 6. | G.W.Supplee, and Mrs.Supplee | 1922-1949 |
| 7. | B.I.Anderson | 1951-1954 |
| Wokha (Lotha) | | |
| 1. | W.E.Witter and Mrs.Witter | 1885-1888 |
| 2. | H.Houston, and Mrs.Houston | 1947-1954 |
| Aizuto (Sema) | | |
| 1. | B.I.Anderson, and Mrs.Anderson | 1948-1950 |
| 2. | R.F.Delano, and Mrs.Delano | 1950-1955 |

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Every group of people whether primitive or civilized has always tried to maintain an identity. This identity is expressed through their culture and philosophies, which are intrinsic to human existence. This identity cannot be borrowed nor super imposed because of the geographical settings and cultural surroundings, context and though forms differ from one group to another. However a society cannot remain stagnant, it must change with the time.¹

There are various factors which influence these changes in a society. These changes always effect the life of the people and such changes may be either the result of a plan and conscious effort by individuals and groups, or may be the result of unexpected events. They may be either slow or fast; evolutionary or revolutionary; and progressive or otherwise.

Historically the Nagas have remained isolated and untouched from well advanced civilizations. Nearly six hundred years of proximity to the sanskritized² Ahom civilization or Buddhism in Burma have not succeeded in having any appreciable effects on the Nagas. For centuries they have remained cocooned in their extraordinary rugged terrain "protected" to nurture their own

1 K.Thanzauva, "Theological Basis for Social Transformation: Methodological Implications of Third World Liberation Theology in the Context of Mizoram, North East India", unpublished D.Th Thesis, Melbourne, 1993.

2 A term introduced by M.N.Srinivas, to describe the process like "Hinduized" or "Aryanized" in his Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of Southern India (1952) also used by F.S.Downs in his Christianity in N.E.India (1983) to distinguish between those who were -- those who were not sanskritized before the advent of British administration (plain and hill people of Assam).

distinct socio-cultural polity and religious identity. But during the nineteenth and the twentieth century tremendous change has taken place in the Naga society as a result of contact with the West. Christianity and British administration were the two primary agents of change.

Christianity was first introduced in the Ao country in 1871, and two decades later in 1899 the British administration followed suit. British colonization, introduction of currency, Western education, transport and communication etc. all played an important role in changing the life style of the people. But for better or for worse, Christianity has the distinction of paving the way and laying the platform for interaction between the Naga society and the Western modern civilization. The period under study, 1870-1955, is of great historical importance to the people, as it not only marked the beginning and end of American Foreign Missionary activities in Naga Hills, it was a period when Christianity as a religion made a niche in the life of the Naga people. It witnessed tremendous church growth, evangelization, and spread of Western education, completely altering traditional socio-cultural life style. The role of British administration shall not be overlooked nor down played. However the main focus of this dissertation is to understand the role of Christianity in bringing about social change among the Ao Nagas.

Social change has often been used synonymously with social transformation, but for the sake of clarity it shall be distinguished here. While social transformation is understood as progressive change, moving forward,

social change here denotes a neutral term which may mean either a destructive or progressive change.

"...The subject of social change is vast and complex and an adequate understanding of it will require the collaboration of many years, a number of scholars in such diverse fields"³ because no single approach has the answer to the all important question. A good number of studies on "tribes" have been produced by various social scientists who deal with social change and reaction among the various hill-tribes of North East India. But they have rather neglected the contribution of Christianity. Some scholars who have studied the tribes have taken a priori position against any positive role of Christianity. They suffer from inadequacy and imperfection in terms of empirical and theoretical rigour, and disregard not only the impact of Christianity but also its ecclesiastical records viz., church reports, proceedings, letters and tour dairies of American missionaries. Any scholastic work on the North-East that exclude Christianity would be incomplete. The research "Christianity and social change" is an attempt to fill the gap in the present existing literature, to see change from the Christian perspective though it may have its own limitation. The work is a sincere attempt on the part of the researcher to study both the positive as well as the negative impact of Christianity in the socio-cultural life of the Ao Nagas.

3 M.N.Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Allied Publishers, Bombay, 1966, p.1.

Before we study the impact of Christianity in the socio-cultural life of the Aos, it is imperative to understand the interaction between Christianity and traditional Ao Naga religion. If we study the differences and the similarities between the two religions it can be traced how the missionaries were able to take advantage of the compatibility between the two religions, resorting to match important features of Christian doctrine with corresponding features of the Ao system. This study will give us an overview of the peoples' response to Christianity and the tremendous impact it had on their socio-cultural outlook.

Interaction Between Christianity and Traditional Ao Naga Religion

The religion of the traditional Ao was not a moral code. It was a system of ceremonies, and an Ao would not prosper if he omitted the sacrifices due to the deities around him, who if unappeased were ever ready to blight his crops and bring illness upon him.⁴ The Ao universe was filled with a multitude of spirits with whom they had to deal. From them came diseases, madness, death of cattle and famine. The propitiation of the evil and capricious spirit was practically the sum and substance of their religion. They also believed in benevolent spirits, who were not propitiated, as such spirits did not interfere in their daily lives.⁵

4 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.215.

5 W.C.Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, p.78.

Richard Eaton, divides the Ao Naga religious cosmology into a two tiered system, an upper tier consisting of *Lungkijingba*, the supreme deity, who underpinned the universe and who though benevolent was but vaguely understood and seldom approached because of his remoteness from the every day concerns of Naga community. The lower tier of the traditional Naga cosmology consists of a host of minor spirits, unlike the supreme god, these spirits were more sharply perceived and given far greater action precisely because they controlled the immediate reality which the Naga experienced. Since they controlled the immediate reality of every day life - disease, crops, rain, human fertility, death etc. *Lizaba* seems to have been more clearly defined by the Aos than *Lungkijingba* as most offerings and sacrifices were made to him. Such a day of sacrifices was one of many Ao gennas, a genna being a term used by all Nagas to denote a ritual holiday during which certain activities were taboo. On this particular genna for example no one would husk rice or fetch fire wood from the stacks outside the village.⁶

Both *Lungkijingba* and *Lizaba* were called *Tsungrem* by the Aos, that is 'spirit' who, when given a name or identified with a place, were endowed not only with power but personality, as opposed to other natural or supernatural forces, such as the sun and the moon, which were also endowed with power and worshipped accordingly but not with personality. In this way there were also in the heavens a number of sky deities called *Anung tsungrem* (sky spirit)

6 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.71.

with whom men had limited concern since they could do little but cause hail.⁷ Apart from them there were numerous spirits which were locally specific, *Ki tsungrem* (house spirit) *Arem tsungrem* (jungle spirit) *Kimung tsungrem* (house site spirit) and spirits which infested large rocks. Elaborate ceremonies had therefore to be performed to keep the various *tsungrems* at bay. Mills writes, "on their good will largely depend a man's health and happiness. They are every where in the jungle, in the fields, in the village, by streams, in tress and most favorite haunt of all, in the huge boulders, which are so numerous in the Ao country."⁸

The higher *Tsungrem* were generally invoked, especially *Lizaba* by village priests called 'putirs' for the goodwill of the whole community. Another specialist required for dealing with concerns, affecting individuals in their struggle with the swarm of malevolent spirits were called 'medicine man', 'diviner' or soothsayer (in Ao, *Arasentsur*). 'The medicine man' was called usually to deal with the abnormal.

The following account sketches the main features of Ao Naga cosmology and how it interacts with Ao society. According to Eaton, it is a system for explaining how the world works. The first is its internal logic and self-sufficient rationality. For example, the explanation given by the Aos of solar eclipse was that of a huge tiger eating the sun. To restore the sun to its proper

7 Ibid, p.7.

8 Ibid, p.216.

condition, huge war drums were beaten in order to frighten away the beast. The cognitive aspect of Naga religion, its capacity to predict, explain and control the phenomenal world, is nowhere better seen than in this case, for every time the ritual of beating the drum was performed, the sun was returned to its normal state. In sum, the belief explains the phenomenon, and the rituals confirmed the belief.⁹

The other salient feature of Ao cosmology is its close identification with the Ao section of the Naga Hills and its inhabitants. Mary Clark recognised this, writing in 1907 she commented,

Many of the Aos have not travelled beyond their own country, their horizon embraces for them the world.

Further she wrote,

Lizaba was accredited to have been the world maker. But the Aos never travelled much beyond their own country and their horizon was supposed to embrace all there was of the world, so though Lizaba has the credit of being world makers, all he did (by tradition) was to level the surface of the plains of Assom valley.¹⁰

From the above description of Ao Naga religious cosmology, we can learn that it was an ongoing attempt on the part of the people to explain, predict and control their otherwise limited world. This world was also infested with malevolent spirit whose presence perplexed the Nagas. To explain away such

9 Richard Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas, 1876-1971", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol.21, no.1, January-March 1984, p.25.

10 E.W.Clark, *Ao-Naga Dictionary*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1911, p.350.

mysteries deities of one Naga group would be occasionally incorporated into another group, showing certain fluidity in their religious belief. Mills writes:

For instance, should a sick man be told by the 'medicine man' whom he consulted that it is a *tsungrem* of the Phom country (another Naga group, to the East) which is holding his son's soul to ransom he will offer a little thread of the kind which the Phom buy keenly from the Aos or should the patient have been attacked by the Assamese *tsungrem* while trading on the plains he will make his offering into two little bundles and attach them to a miniature Assamese carrying pole, for an Assamese *tsungrem* would naturally never use a Naga carrying pole.¹¹

Though *tsungrem* could be locally specific, they would also be borrowed or adopted in some way by a neighbouring tribe, which means the Naga religion was inherently elastic, fluid and adaptive. It was not static but dynamic. It reflects the ongoing attempts of a society to explain, predict and control its environment. The chief reason for the high degree of fluidity in Naga religion according to Eaton is the lack of writing system by which a more stable religious system could have evolved. He further goes to say, "For just as if it is incorrect to depict the Nagas as having no religion at all, as some British administrators did, it is equally incorrect to see Naga religion as an unchanging structure which Christianity simply replaced. Rather one finds Naga religion, already in a process of evolution, made further adaptations in their encounter with Christianity so as to incorporate it and, in the process, to transform what had been an alien religious system into an indigenous one."¹²

11 J.P. Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.216.

12 Richard Eaton, *op.cit.*, p.6.

Naga scholars Panger Imchen and Kedutso Kapfu are also of the opinion that there is a striking similarity between the Naga religion and Christianity. Both religions believe in good and evil spirit; life after death (though not defined properly in Ao religion, the practise of disposing the death along with his belongings indicates a vague belief, and according to Aos life continues after death in the village called Asuyim (village of death)¹³ and like the Christians, who believe in the existence of heaven and hell, they also believed in the existence of two distinct places - one a good and beautiful place which is the village of good spirits; the other, a bad village, which is the village of evil spirits. In the words of Kapfu, a Naga scholar:

We cannot say that their religion is completely extinguished after embracing Christianity. The main differences are that for Christians there is only one God and one has to accept Christ as his personal saviour, which non Christians do not concerned about it. The message of salvation which were never known in the past is brought by the belief in Christ. They also worship evil spirit so that it may not harm them. Whereas Christianity never worship any other thing except their God.¹⁴

From the beginning the pioneer American missionaries, realizing the compatibility between Christianity and Ao Naga religion, resorted to match important features of Christian doctrine with corresponding features of the Ao

13 P.J.Ao, "The 'Here-After': Traditional Ao Nagas", in Sujata Miri, *Religion and Society of North-East India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1980, p.63.

14 Kedutso Kapfu, "Language and Cultural Identity in Nagaland", in B.Pakem, ed., *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North East India*, Omson Publication, New Delhi, 1990, p.329.

system.¹⁵ E.W.Clark wrote in 1881, "The fundamental ideas are there, perverted it is true, but there. And most of the needful terms are there."¹⁶ The Aos believed in life after death. They had a notion of sin and the need for salvation, which is similar to that of the Christian apocalyptic vision, the Day of Judgement.¹⁷ While translating the New Testament scripture in Ao language, Clark used the Ao term "Molomi" for the great fire that is to end the world, to reciprocate the Biblical Judgement Day. Mills in his monograph on Ao Nagas wrote:

Old men used to talk of this great fire before the missionaries came, and describe it as sweeping up the banks of the Brahmaputra river to burn all that there is on earth.¹⁸

He also suggested that,

This belief was an important reason for the Aos hasty acceptance of Christianity for all. Ao Christians firmly believe that non-Christian brethren are doomed to this terrible fate, and that non-Christian are naturally inclined to think there may be something in them.¹⁹

Another salient feature is of fixing and fitting Christian super beings into the Naga cosmological and linguistic structure.²⁰ Instead of using foreign

15 Richard Eaton, op.cit., p.26.

16 E.W.Clark as quoted in Richard Eaton, *Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas*, p.26.

17 Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, American Baptist Publication, Philadelphia, 1907, pp.57-63.

18 J.P.Mills, *Ao Nagas*, p.100.

19 Ibid, p.413.

20 Richard Eaton, op.cit., p.27.

concepts and entities such as "God", "Christ", "Satan", "Holyspirit", or "Spirit", as rendered in Hebrew, Greek or English, the missionaries used equivalent term found in Naga language, so that the Nagas did not have to learn entirely a new word for each concept. Richard Eaton writes,

In translating 'God' for Ao scriptures, E.W.Clark and his Naga assistants did not use the term standing for any single Ao deity - neither the Ao supreme being Lungkijingba, nor the important creator and crop deity Lizaba. Nor was the foreign term Jinova "used - Rather the Ao Bible translated both Kyrios ('Lor', and 'Master',) and theos ('god', 'God',) by the Ao word Tsungrem, a word that denotes simply 'a spirit' not endowed with any specific attributes. It was in other words a generic term and not a proper noun - and this is the critical point, a Tsungrem was attached to a place only when a word designating that place was attached to the word Tsungrem, e.g., anung tsungrem, 'Sky spirit', aream tsungrem, 'jungle spirit', or Ki-tsung tsingrem, 'house spirit' otherwise it was a neutral concept with no specific attributes: Thus by using the generic term tsugrem for 'God' the missionaries were in effect pulling together what the entire pantheon shared in common - its spiritness, or Tsungrem-ness - and endowing the notion with all power, majesty, transcendence, and universality of the Biblical supreme deity, of what Max Weber called the idea of religious rationalisation or the process of elaborating and clarifying the supreme power of a single, universal deity at the expense of all others, thus replacing Lungkijingba. Only vaguely perceived by the Aos, with a far more sharply defined universalisation of the generic term, while simply liquidating the entire lower tier of lesser spirits.²¹

Thus Clark and his associates utilised and enlarged an indigenous conceptual category instead of imposing a foreign one on the people which, according to Eaton, facilitated the Ao conversion to Christianity.

21 Richard Eaton, *op.cit.*, pp.27-28.

In the twentieth century with more contact with outside world in the form of British administration, the advent of courts undermined the authority of local village elite-figures etc. creating a certain amount of cognitive disruption as the confines of one's world became enlarged so suddenly and drastically. What yesterday had been the entire universe, bounded by the distant mountain range was now but a speck on a vast globe. Those locally specific spirits no longer seemed to be in command of the much larger universe on which many Nagas now lived.

Amidst this break down, and ultimately capitalising on it, were the missionaries and their youthful teacher - converts (Ao Nagas) who claimed to be tapping a source of power, the one *Tsungrem* far greater in magnitude and far more actively involved with the entire macrocosm than any of the former spirits of Ao cosmology. According to Eaton "The acceptance of their Christian conception of God has been facilitated by (i) his ability to deliver man from fear of their malevolent spirit (ii) his identification with new solution to old problems in the area of physical afflictions, and (iii) his infinite power rendered both timeless and unchangeable by his being enshrined in a written text the Christian scripture."²²

In the first instance, it was believed that if the property of anybody dying an unnatural death was not destroyed, certain spirits would work evil on the persons handling that property. Accordingly, when a woman of Molung

22 Richard Eaton, op.cit., p.30.

Christian village was killed by a tiger, the villagers were confronted with the potentially dangerous consequence of working the fields of the afflicted family. When they ultimately did work on the field and no untoward incident ensued, the credibility of the old system correspondingly dropped while the faith of the villagers in the power of God preached by Clark was correspondingly confirmed.²³ Another case in point: E.W. Clark was once warned not to go near a huge boulder where a mighty and influential spirit dwelled. But to his amazement Clark went back and forth unharmed before the sacred boulder and soon a new direct path was blazed passing directly by the rock.²⁴ One more deity had thereby been discredited. This suggests that the deliverance from fearsome spirit continued to be an important factor in the spread of Christianity among the Ao Nagas.

Secondly, Christianity was associated with a new powerful technique of dealing with physical pain or diseases. In one village (identified as a Sema village by F.S.Downs) a woman became desperately ill and all methods of cure including sacrifices of pigs, chickens, etc., were tried without success. Finally the villagers decided to try praying to the Christian God and agreed that should she get well they would all become Christians and if not would remain unconverted. The woman recovered, and the entire village kept its vow.²⁵

23 Mary Mead Clark, *op.cit.*, pp.60-61.

24 *Ibid*, p.59.

25 Victor H.Sword, *Baptists in Assam*, Conference Press, Chicago, 1935, p.115.

Once the association between Christianity and healing (apart from the medical work) become sufficiently complete in the minds of the people it did not take them to accept the power-filled doctrine as preached by Clark and other missionaries.

And lastly, the most significant cognitive dimension to the introduction of Christianity among the Nagas is that it was accompanied with literacy, and the very first literature presented to them was Christian scripture. As early as 1876, Clark on realizing the absence of lettered text among the Nagas wrote, "It is well-recognised fact in India that aboriginal tribes like the Nagas who are not Hindu, Mussalman or Buddhist, constitute by far the most promising field of missionary labour in India."²⁶ Given the fluidity of Naga religion and its dynamic nature, a potent *tsungrem* (*Lizaba* or other spirits) of one generation may be ignored by the next. But *tsungrem* one supreme deity preached by the Christians, possesses a fixed and unaltered status in the cosmos. His commands and his promises are frozen by the power of the written word and cannot easily be ignored or forgotten.²⁷

The above discussion on the interaction between Christianity and traditional Ao Naga religion gives us an in-depth understanding of the people's

26 E.W.Clark as quoted in Richard Eaton, "*Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas*, p.32.

27 Richard Eaton, *op.cit.*, p.32.

response to Christianity. Why Christianity was more preferable as a religion.

In the word of E.T.Sunup, an 'Ao' himself,

... the pre-Christian Naga culture was deeply submerged in the religious beliefs of the people. Anything that a Naga did or anything that ever happened in their life was almost invariably associated with some taboo, superstition, witchcraft, worship of the demons residing in the trees, stones, lakes and so on or with some legalistic conventions of age-long customs.²⁸

But with the coming of Christianity this fatalistic attitude towards life, fear of spirits, and superstition diminished, and life was instilled with new faith and hope. He also further goes to say, "the new religion offered them food to satisfy their religious bent of mind". Speaking on the same subject Panger Imchen in his book *Ancient Ao Naga Religion*, points out that the ancient Ao religion was not alien to the interpretation of the gospel but rather has been preparatory to the coming of the gospel, since both are similar in belief and content.²⁹

Whereas F.S.Downs sees the people response to Christianity in a different perspective. According to him the people's response to Christianity can be best understood as a part of a previously isolated people's response to traumatic changes brought about as a result of British annexation of the country. For the first time the whole religion was brought within an all India

28 E.T.Sunup, "Glimpse at the Impact of Christianity on Naga Culture", in *Warrior*, vol.4, no.1, Director of Information, Publicity and Tourism, Nagaland, 1971, p.2.

29 Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, Haranand Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.170.

political system, undermining the traditional authority of the village chief. And along with the administration came a significant number of outsiders - American missionaries as well as Bengalese, Assamese, Hindi speaking clerks and Marwaris, the sanskritic civilization of what N.Ray refers to as the Hindu brahmanical community³⁰ representing powerful forces of change.

All people require a world-view that provides them with an explanation, a rationalization of their life experiences. The traditional primal world view, simply was not large enough for the new situation. In the face of this threat, on several occasions what might be called cultural-reactionary movement had sprung up that led to rebellion. This rebellion set the old order against the new, and the new victories in each instance. The defeat at arms had deep cultural significance for a warrior people. And in order to function effectively in the new order ushered in by British administration they had to learn the ways of the court and bureaucracy. F.S.Downs writes,

In order to do this they need to adjust themselves to the new realities, or in the jargon of the sociologist, find a suitable means of acculturation. Practically speaking, two options were opened to them: sanskritization and Christianization.³¹

It was Christianity which was more attractive to the people, since assimilation into the Hindu society would mean incorporation of the tribal at the very lowest level. But there was no similar threat from the adoption of

30 F.S.Downs, *Christianity in North East India*, p.192.

31 Ibid, p.192.

Christianity in so far as there was no dominant society of that religion into which they would be assimilated at a disadvantage to themselves. N.Ray also noted that the tribals in this situation see sanskritization as a threat to their distinct identity. He writes,

Any sensitive and knowledgeable person is aware that among certain tribal communities, especially among those on our north-eastern borders, nourish the apprehension that being drawn into the mainstream of contemporary Indian life would mean their complete absorption by the larger and more dominant society of which by far the largest in number are Hindus. Looking at the whole past history of the method of 'tribal' absorption adopted by the Hindu society, this fear is perhaps not altogether without some reason, one must.... Any consideration in the contemporary context, of the traditional Hindu method of tribal absorption is therefore sheer madness to my mind.³²

Christianity also brought the tribal skill necessary to function effectively within the new society that modernization was ushering in (through education). It thus helped ensure that political and economic power would not pass into the hands of outsiders because the local people lacked the necessary skill to maintain that power under the new circumstances. Thus Christianity provided an ideology that helped the tribal people to maintain their identity in the face of these serious challenges. To Panger Imchen "Christianity does not demean our culture but it help us to see things in a new perspective with pride for ourselves and our culture. What Christianity did was to save the process from becoming one of detribalization.

32 N.Ray, "Introductory Letter", in K.S.Singh, ed., *Tribal Situation in India*, Indian Institute of Advance Study, Simla, 1972, p.23.

Impact of Christianity

While studying the Christian impact on social change among the Ao Nagas, one has to keep in mind that Christianity first came to the Ao areas in 1872 and the British Administration only in 1899. Here the precursor to change has been Christian religion and not British administration, as F.S. Downs points out. His work "Christianity in North East India" is a macro study done on the whole of North East and not on any specific tribe.

In the two decades prior to the advent of British administration Christianity had already found its base among the Aos. In 1872 a church was established at Dekahaimong village and in 1876 a new Christian village was formed at Molung. Mrs Clark started educational work with the opening of a girls' school in 1876. And by 1897 the Aos had formed their own Baptist Association. In 1894 a new mission was set-up at Impur, which became the centre for learning and Christian activity both within and outside the Ao areas. By 1900 the Ao Church could boast of 368 communicants. These developments had tremendous social impact.

The primary concern of the colonial power was commercial. They had no intention of annexing the Naga Hills, which gave them no profit in terms of raw material, revenue or market for their products. Even after their annexation of the Naga Hills due to political expediency, maintained a least possible interference in the life of the people. The bulk of people's interaction was with the missionaries who lived amongst them in the remote villages.

The impact of Christianity can be seen in the following areas:

Literature: Through the introduction of literature, a new tribal identity emerged. Each traditional village was a state. People were confined to clans and village welfare, without having a general consciousness of the tribe. Added to it, the Ao tribe spoke three different dialects - *Mongsen*, *Chungli* and *Chanki*, of which the missionaries reduced the *Chunli* dialect to script which was eventually learned by the whole tribe thereby providing a common linguistic medium and thus unity of the tribe.

Education: The introduction of modern education by the missionaries ushered in a modern world view among the Ao tribe. These mission schools became the nurseries for change. They sowed the gospel, established churches and provided a new world view. It was in these schools people assimilated not only a new faith, but also politics, science and technology.

According to F.S.Downs, mission school served two basic functions: first it broke down the barriers of 'superstition' that prevented people from hearing and responding to the Gospel.³³ Secondly, it provided a means of Christian instruction and access to the Christian scriptures and other forms of Christian literature. This served both an immediate evangelistic purpose and a longer term objective of building up an indigenous Christian community.³⁴

33 F.S.Downs, *Christianity in North East India*, p.199.

34 Ibid, p.200.

Education not only brought together a sense of oneness among Ao tribes, but it also promoted inter-tribal relationship. For example, the school at Impur was the main centre of learning in the Naga Hills till the 1940s. And pupils from all the neighbouring tribes - Sema, Lotha, Konyak, Phom etc. would gather at Impur to study. In this way education brought a sense of oneness among the Naga tribes.

Gospel a New Life Style: When the Aos accepted Christianity and received Christ into their hearts their lives were completely changed. They gave up their old evil practices of head hunting and war; divorce lessened; polygamy faded; and the people no longer took pride in drinking and eating opium.

Another area of Christian influence on their life style was on personal cleanliness, hygienic living condition, and clothing. This kind of emphasis upon living conditions is seen in the matters discussed at the first session of the Ao Naga Baptist Association held at Molung in 1897. In addition to subjects like "prayer" and "evangelism" etc. there was extensive discussion on how to bury the dead (till this time the Christians had followed the traditional platform burial system) and by what changes in food, houses, sanitation, and clothing would Christians better their mode of living?³⁵ Because of this practice of cleanliness others could judge who was a Christian. But more important than that was the impact of cleanliness on healthy living and a cultured way of life.

35 M.M.Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.143.

A very important contribution of Christianity was to provide a new relationship between different villages based on "Christian love for neighbours and enemies alike". It not only fostered Christian unity amongst them but also lead to evangelical activities outside their own territory. The Ao Baptist Association played a significant role, by bringing members of different Ao villages within a common structure for the first time. This created a sense of tribal and regional identity which had not existed before, thus creating a foundation for modern conception of political identity, though it was not a conscious objective of either the missionaries or the church. The impact of missionaries and Christian religion in bringing about social change among the Ao Nagas cannot be over emphasised or easily ignored. However there are also some negative influence to it.

Every land and people have their own unique way of growing into civilization. What may work with one primitive group may not necessarily succeed with another, and it was not as if the Nagas were an entirely barbaric race. Beneath a crude exterior of nakedness and head hunting, they possessed an indigenous culture, an effective system of self-government, and several very sane and good laws. They had some admirable institutions such as houses for young men. Besides, they had always been self-sufficient in food and were adept weavers. True their needs were limited but they had lived so for centuries and had managed to remain a people full of zest and vigour.

The missionaries were very short sighted and often in their Christian zeal refused to heed the warnings of Ethnologists and Sociologists. For them everything traditional was bad and had to be given up, as it had to do with superstition spirit worship and heathen rituals. The Nagas by converting to Christianity had to become a new people. They had to discard all their old customs and cultural practices, and embrace western culture. The missionaries thus banned the most important Naga social and cultural institution - the Morung or the bachelor dormitory. In a tribal society a distinction cannot be made between religious, social, cultural and political elements, since all are interconnected. If one is effected all are effected. Hence any change in one of them could together create a social trauma. Through out their occupation of Naga Hills, the missionaries and British administrators were faced with this complex issue of differentiating between what was sacred and profane in the custom and cultural practices of the people. Haimendorf observed:

Government officials and missionaries took unfortunately exactly opposite views on what was good for the Nagas, and a great deal of confusion must have been created in the minds of the tribesmen if one Sahib praised the Morungs as an excellent institution and the other decried it as an invention of the spirits.³⁶

History bears ample testimony to the fact that periods of transition anywhere and in any sphere are delicate periods and need careful watching on the part of the reformers. Though the government officials and heralds of

36 Haimendorf Von Furer, *The Naked Nagas, An Anthropologist View of Nagaland, 1936-1970*, Vikas Publication, Delhi, 1976.

Christianity did not mean intentional harm, they very often in their misguided zeal sought to pack into a couple of decades changes which should have normally taken centuries. The results have been more revolutionary than evolutionary, creating chaos in the Naga Hills.

The Ao Naga society is changing very fast from tradition to modernity due to the fact that the American missionaries landed in Ao region first and established churches and school there. It is natural that when two cultures, one tribal and the other modern, comes into contact with each other, the resultant reaction appears in three phases. Firstly, the modern culture which is usually more dynamic and aggressive produces a shattering effect. Here all indigenous values appear outdated and out-moded and people abandon it. In the second phase reformers try to convince the people the good of their old culture. It is often a period of confusion, a period to choose between the new and the old. The third phase is a logical development of the second where a synthesis is drawn from the two cultures.³⁷

The Ao Naga society today appears to be passing through the second phase, still groping to find its way and assert its identity. The society is in a formless state because the old order and its values are crumbling and the new order and its values have yet to take shape. In this context the serious challenge of the church today, is to pick up the advantages of the rich cultural

37 Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.174.

heritage of the people while attempting to promote Christianity and welfare of the church creating a strong Christian foundation.

Commenting on the impact of Christianity in Verrier Elwin remarks:

"The activities of the Baptist Missionaries among the Nagas have demoralised the people, destroyed tribal solidarity and forbidden their joys and feasting, the decorations and romance of communal life."³⁸ J.H. Hutton also deploras, "old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten, the number of Christian or quasi-Christians is steady increasing, and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life."³⁹ However it is one thing to criticise and another thing to start pioneering work as the mission did. Prakash Singh rightly observed:

The early pioneers were undoubtedly men of grit and self-determination and they had a tremendous crusading zeal. No hills were too high for them, no jungles impenetrable, and no tribes unapproachably ferocious. The difficulties under which they lived, the hazards they braved, and the unpredictable situations they faced are a sage of heroic missionary activity. And the missionaries had the vision and foresight to identify themselves completely with the tribals in whose midst they lived. Even in the remotest places the missionary lived as the tribal lived, ate what the local took and tried to merge completely in the background. A sympathetic attitude, backed by acts of practice piety like providing medical facilities and opening schools, naturally drew a sympathetic response from the Nagas, and a steady stream of them were drawn to the cross.⁴⁰

38 Verrier Elwin, *The Aborigines*, Oxford pamphlet on Indian Affairs cited in Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, Manas Publication, New Delhi, 1974, p.120.

39 J.H. Hutton, *Angami Nagas*, pp.vii-viii.

40 Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, National Book Trust, New delhi, 1972, p.174.

Horam writes,

Regrettably, even today not a single Indian both secular or religious organisation exists and if the Nagas have a love and soft corner for the missionaries, specially the American missionaries, it is not the fault but natural and spontaneous flow of human love and gratitude.⁴¹

41 M.Horam, *North East India, A Profile*, Cosmos Publication, New Delhi, 1990, p.200.

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