

# CHRISTIANS IN AO LAND

*Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy*

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JULY, 1998



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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled **Christians in Ao Land** submitted by **Lanusangla Tzudir** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Master of Philosophy** is her original work according to the best of our knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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**Dedicated to My Parents**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Prof. Neeladri Bhattacharya for his thought provoking supervision, intrinsic deftness in helping me shape my ideas properly. Many of the thoughts and ideas presented here are due to Prof. Bhattacharya's penetrating and scholarly suggestions. It was a privilege working under him. This work owes most to him.

I wish record to record my thanks to the Pastor and Deacon Board of Molungyimsen Baptist Church, Nagland for being such hospitable hosts during my field work and allowing me access to the church records. My long felt interest in the topic was naturally stimulated acutely because of them.

Special thanks to Odi Imsutemjen for being an excellent travelling guide and companion during my trip to Molungyimsen village. Thank you, Oko Walu Walling and Odi Imomanen Tzudir for your encouragement and suggestions. I am also thankful to Mr. Nungsangmeren Longkumer for much interest in my work and taking the pain of helping me in reading Rev. E.W. Clark's hand written letters which was quite a strainful job.

Moa Imchen and Toshi Jamir, thanks a ton for being my hosts and for the entertainment and laughter while doing my research work at the Eastern Theological College in Jorhat.

A word of thanks to the staffs of Nehru Memorial Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi, Vidya Jyoti Theological College library, Delhi, Eastern Theological College library, Jorhat. Council of Baptist Churches of North East India library, Gauwahati and J.N.U. library, New Delhi.

My parents, brothers and sister have throughout been most encouraging and inspiring. They have been my strength and sustenance. I can never thank them enough.

Thanks to my friends Alenuo, Gladice, Lemti, Rani, Sarah and all my others friends for their love and prayers.

A big thank you to Mayjee Philip who went through the manuscript in a meticulous way and offered valuable suggestions.

My sincere thanks to Lima Jamir and Agiang for the excellent typing of the chapters and giving the final shape to the work. God bless you.

Above all, I acknowledge Almighty God for His faithfulness, His enduring mercy and love for me who enabled me to write this dissertation.

*Lanusangla Izudir*  
(LANUSANGLA IZUDIR)

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## PREFACE

An important landmark in the history of the Nagas was the celebration of one hundred and twenty five years of Christianity in Nagaland in November 1997. Nagaland is one of the states in India, which has the highest Christian population. In fact, the association of Christianity and Naga identity is so strong that a Naga child grows up to think that all Nagas are Christian by origin. This was the assumption that I, a Naga and a Christian, internalized in my childhood. I remember being surprised when in my college days I came to know that all Nagas are not Christian.

Reflecting back, I remember how I could make little distinction between Christian practices and Naga culture. The cultural practices I saw as traditional were all influenced by Christianity. Gradually it occurred to me that the association of Christianity with Naga identity is a part of recent history structured by conflict. This intensified my interest in the history of Christianity in Nagaland. Subsequently this interest prompted me to look at the process of conversion of Nagas to Christianity, a history which is so profoundly imprinted on the Nagas.

My research focuses only on the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Ao Nagas before and after the advent of Christianity in Nagaland. It is interesting to note that the Aos were the first among the Naga tribes to be Christianized by the American Baptist Missionaries. The Aos occupy a portion in Nagaland bounded by the Dikhu river on the south east, the edge of the plains on the North West, the

Konyaks on the North East and the Semas and Lothas on the South West. The Ao country is divided into six administrative ranges: Ongpangkong, Asetkong, Langpangkong, Changkikong, Japukong and Tzurangkong. The Aos are composed of at least four linguistic groups representing Mongsen, Chungli, Changki, and Sangpur.

The first chapter of my dissertation will present the nature of cultural encounter when people of two distinct cultures confront each other. It deals with the Missionary's perception of the Ao Nagas, the Missionary propaganda amongst the Aos and the conflicts which marked the process of conversion.

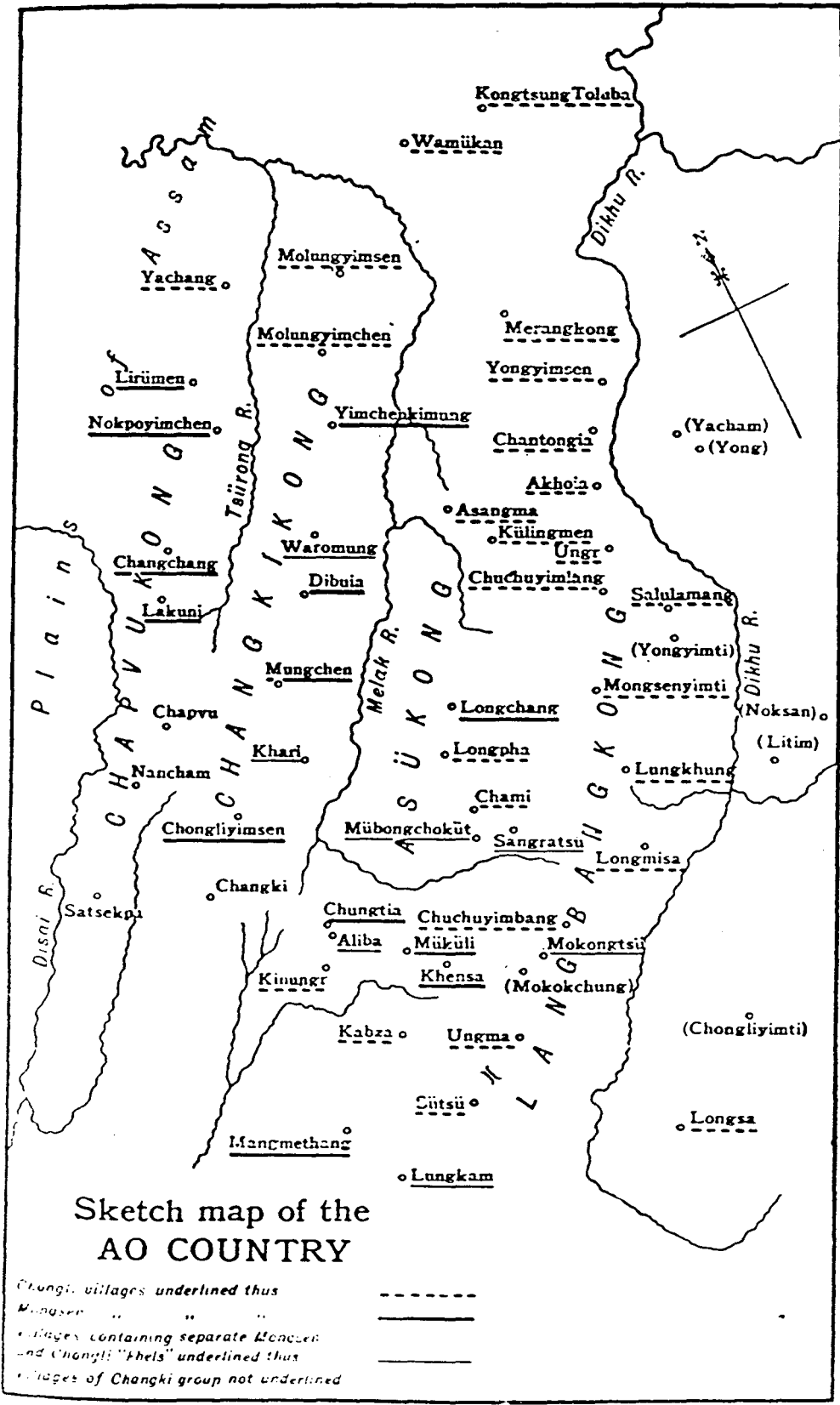
The second chapter is concerned with the attempt by Ao Christian scholars to investigate the significance and meanings of ideas and practices of Traditional Ao religion. Ao christian scholars have drawn the attention to the failure of the Christian Missionaries to discern the positive ideas and concepts of Ao religion. A study of these Christian scholars allow us to understand how Naga Christians attempt to understand and relate to their past and present.

The third chapter looks into the inherent conflicts, confrontations and negotiations that took place in the Ao society as a result of conversion to Christianity. This chapter will not only look into the issues of conflict between the Christian Aos and the non Christian Aos, but also the kind of tensions that prevailed among the Missionaries while they served among the Ao Nagas. I will try to show how the Ao society was re-structured, and how this process was marked by conflict.



The fourth chapter takes into account the Missionary strategies to educate the Aos. It deals with the way Missionaries tried to form a common platform with the people to hasten the process of evangelization and conversion. Various issues that are related to the introduction of education by the Missionaries will be discussed in this chapter.

The dissertation is based on a research into a variety of sources. The letters and records of the Missionaries who served among the Aos give insights into the early history of success, failures and problems of the Missionaries. The Molungyimsen Baptist Church in Nagaland has copies of these records and letters. These records and letters were originally housed in the Archives of the American Baptist International Ministries in Pennsylvania and in the Library of American Baptist Historical Study, in Rochester New York. Other primary sources for writing the dissertation consist of Assam Baptist Missionary Union Conference reports and records, 1887-1936, and the papers and discussion of the Jubilee Conference 1886 of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union. These records were obtained from the Eastern Theological College Archives Jorhat. Pertaining to the Mission work among the Aos, this research has depended much on the Baptist Missionary Magazine which was published by the American Baptist Missionary Union, which is available at the Council of Baptist Churches of Northeast India, Guwahati. In addition to Missionary sources, I have looked at the travel accounts, official reports and Naga histories written by Nagas.



Sketch map of the  
AO COUNTRY

Chungli villages underlined thus   
 Monasen " " " "   
 villages containing separate Monasen   
 and Chungli "khels" underlined thus   
 villages of Changki group not underlined

## CHAPTER – I

### NON-CHRISTIAN AO NAGAS

The early missionary accounts describe the cultural encounter between Christianity and AOs. The American Baptist missionaries who served among the Nagas have always tried to know the people amongst whom they worked. The missionaries were aware of the fact that an understanding of the indigenous culture would be essential if the gospel was to be communicated to the AOs. “Bringing the gospel to these savage hill tribes taxed to the utmost the resources of the Missionary. A good knowledge of their language, habits and character is absolutely essential for gaining their confidence and winning souls”.<sup>1</sup>

The Missionary push into the Naga Hills is a fascinating part of Naga history. Missionary diaries, reports and records enable us to paint the picture of how the AOs were perceived in the eyes of Christian outsiders. These records contain much information and reflect the variegated patterns of thoughts and attitudes of the missionary towards the AOs. In their letters and reports the missionaries share with the readers their world of adventure, their delights, shocks and surprises, the variety in their experiences.

#### **Savage Hosts:**

Mrs. Mary Mead Clark, wife of the first Missionary to the Ao land, in her

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, American Baptist Publication Society, 1907, p.68.

book, *A corner in India* paints a characteristically lucid account of her first encounter with the Aos when she was being persuaded into buying goats.

I don't want the goat! I don't want it, I will not have it! Take it away, yet these strange uncivilised men, down from their mountain fastness still persisted in dragging up the steps of the verandah of our bungalow a large, long horned hill goat, hoping to receive from us double or quadruple its value and nothing short of landing it inside the house to satisfy them. Thus was I introduced to these stalward, robust warriors, dressed mostly in war medals, each man grasping his spear shaft decorated with goat's hair, dyed red and yellow and fringed with the long black hair of a woman, telling the story of bloody deeds.<sup>2</sup>

When the Missionary expressed his desire to take the gospel to the Naga Hills, the people of Assam warned him by saying "They are savages, Sahib, village warring with village, constantly cutting off heads to get skulls."<sup>3</sup> When Rev. E.W. Clark, wanted to start the Naga Mission, he wrote to the American Baptist Missionary Union about the Nagas: "Now a few words about the savages of the hills, they are men of blood and war".<sup>4</sup>

The Aos were thus dubbed as head-hunters, savages, uncivilised and dirty, and like other natives interested in cheating the outsiders. In this context it is important to examine the constituent elements of these perceptual categories and see how they became a part of the missionary image of this tribe. A.C. Bowers in his book *Under Head-Hunters Eyes* recorded Rev.E.W.Clark reminiscence of his

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark, *Letter* to Dr. Warren, Dated 5 December, 1871.Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record. Nagaland.

initial encounter with the Aos when they had come down from the hills the plains of Assam:

At this time there was a boys school being conducted for the children and for any others who would come. One day I was there examining the classes, some wild Nagas came to the door. They were short, sturdy men, naked but for a small apron, and to our eyes exceedingly dirty.....As they crowded around the door, the odour from their sweaty bodies and the reek of their short-stemmed pipes which several continued to smoke, was anything but sweet.<sup>5</sup>

To the Missionary the Aos seemed to be people who were still living a primitive way of life. The dirty outward appearance of the Aos was not the only reason which made the missionary categorise them as dirty and primitive. Describing the squalid surroundings of the Aos, Mrs. Clark wrote:

The houses are built long and narrow with steep roofs, which project in front several feet beyond the outside walls, thus forming somewhat spacious verandah, where guests were entertained. Numerous pigs, dogs, and fowls enjoy the shade, and much work is done there. The first room, answering to a front hall, extending crosswise, has an earth floor, and is furnished with a large wooden mortar for hulling rice. The pig trough is there, and here the domestic animals pass the night, although Mr. Cock and Mrs. Hen usually perch farther on in the family room. There is never a chimney.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs Clark found that the most conspicuous thing about the houses of the heathen Nagas were the upturned cooking pots, bound on the gable symbolizing

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<sup>5</sup> A.C.Bowers, *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*, Philadelphia, The Judson Press, 1929, Rev.E.W.Clark. Quoted, p.197.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.43.

hospitality. Mrs. Clark had no hesitation in asserting that the Ao Nagas were uncivilized barbarous:

Close by the village gates, and high up in nearby tree, within or without the stockade, lookout houses were built, and occupied by sentinels. Within and near the gates were the "barracks" for unmarried warriors, abounding in unmistakable evidences of an uncivilized and barbarous people. On the great central post were carved very good representations of men, elephants, lizards, snakes, and skulls human and imitation found a place in the various decorations. The young warriors slept with spears close at hand. Extra spear, shafts and large quantities of torch materials were kept in readiness.<sup>7</sup>

Another evident characteristic of the Naga barbarism was seen to be their love for war and human heads. Listen to Mrs. Clark describing Merangkong, an Ao village. "It was a large village much given to war (as the Nagas expressed it, it had as there were hairs on a man's head) in which it took great pride and the decorations of the village skull house testified to its triumph. God grant that the morning light may be breaking over this dark corner of heathenism and barbarism."<sup>8</sup>

The Aos' craving for human heads and the practice of head-hunting appeared as undisputable evidence of their barbarism. Head hunting, cutting the head of the enemy, was part and parcel of the lives of the Nagas during the period when all the villages were independent. By making a successful raid on another village, they displayed and asserted their might and power over the neighbouring villages. Head-hunting was also based on the belief that it increased the fertility of the village. To

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs.E.W.Clark, *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Vol.LXXI, September,1891, No.9. p.406.

take a human head was the greatest honour for a man; it defined his masculinity and it conferred on him the right to wear certain dresses and ornaments not entitled to others.

In several writings, the missionaries expressed their horror and shock regarding the practice of head hunting among the Ao Nagas:

He is ready to sacrifice to the utmost that his praises may be sung and his name perpetuated. The highest type of glory of which he formerly had any conception was bravery and success in war. Village sites were chosen, planned, and built with reference to war, and paths were taken to the mountain ridges and highlands in order to avoid giving advantage to skulking foes. The heads of women and children counted as much as those of men, the long black hair of women being especially prized for decorations. It was not uncommon for a company of youngmen to bind themselves with an oath to refrain from the gratification of some coveted pleasure until they had brought the head of an enemy into the village. Such trophies won the privilege of ornamenting spear shafts and battle axe handles with tufts of hair, black or dyed red and yellow, adorning their blankets with cowrie shells, and wearing boar tusk necklaces. Men were dubbed as women or cows until they had contributed to the village skull house. Young maidens instigated their betrothed to this bloody work, and it was women's voice that thrilled the cry of victory when these prizes reeking in blood were brought into the village.<sup>9</sup>

The general horror of head hunting was magnified by the fact that children and women- the Western symbols of innocence were killed just as much as men, and women themselves were implicated in these deeds of horror. Instead of

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<sup>9</sup> D.M.Albaugh, *Between Two Centuries: A Study of Four Baptist Mission Fields, Assam, South India, Bangladesh-Orissa, South China*. Philadelphia, Judson Press, 1935, Mary Mead quoted, p.72.

restraining act of savagery, they goaded men into killing the enemy. The very appearance of the Nagas appeared savage. Mary Mead writes:

“Just at evening, coming up through the village gate and passing our bungalow, were twenty four men dressed in all the habiliments of war, bamboo splint hats trimmed with wild boar tusks, the red band, an unmistakable insignia of bloody deeds, battle axes, spears, and shields highly embellished, and the feathers of their favourite birds indicative of victory”.<sup>10</sup>

Blood, it seemed, was splattered on their face. Mrs Clark gives another description of how the might and power of the village was asserted by the trophies they won during a raid or head hunting: “There is much that suggests a comparison with our North American Indians, as they were in the days of their prowess. Human skulls here are as honourable trophies as ever were the scalps to the American savage. Villages that can display but few skulls are held in contempt”.<sup>11</sup>

Other references to Ao as head hunters and warlike people is given by E.W. Clark recorded in A. C. Bower's *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*. "The quiet at one of the gates had been broken by the sudden, loud challenge of the guard. Some one was coming up the hill. Everyone in the village was instantly alert. The men rose and grasped their spears, which were never far from their hands, ready to rush to the defence if necessary. They loosened up their battle axes and stood listening intently."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.103.

<sup>12</sup> Bowers. *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*. Philadelphia. Rev.Clark quoted, pp.202-203.



At one level the observation of the missionaries, allow us a picture of head hunting society - one in which head hunting is not only a game but a social practice of deep significance. Through head hunting a village asserted its power over another village. It also had religious significance, with rituals and ceremonies being attached to this practice. The social significance of head hunting for the Aos lies in the fact that a successful and efficient head hunter had a special place in the society and he was seen as a warrior. Titles and ornaments were given to him and songs deified him.

However, the missionary representation did not simply describe what the Ao people actually were. What is significant is the attitude underlying their description. The descriptions of the missionaries tell us not only how the people actually were, they reveal to us the representational structure within which the missionaries approached the Aos. Their attitude asserted an idea of European dominion over non-European race. The missionary representation of Aos savagery and barbarism etc. is not very different from the West's approach to the Orient or non-other European Society as described by Edward W.Said in his book *Orientalism*: "Primitiveness therefore inhered in the Orient, was the Orient, an idea to which anyone dealing with or writing about the orient had to return, as if to a touchstone outlasting time or experience."<sup>13</sup> Regarding the outsider's early perception of the Nagas, Julian Jacob says: "The earliest accounts seem often to include attitudes towards the Nagas. On the one hand there is evident a paternalistic attitude of superiority, coupled with

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<sup>13</sup> Edward.W.Said, *Orientalism: western Conceptions of the Orient*. Routledge and Kegan. London and Henley, 1978, p.231.

condemnation of supposedly savage habits.<sup>14</sup> According to Jacob, this was "an attitude built on fascination in the discovery of a society that seemed wholly opposite to that of Europe. Once safely defeated, the Nagas as exotic alter ego could prevail over the primitive Nagas as a stereo type."<sup>15</sup>

### **Exotic Hosts:**

As we move on to the deeper level of cultural encounters between the Missionary and the Aos, we find also a series of reactions ranging from appreciation, enthusiasm and delight. These reactions and perceptions completely contradict the stereotypical projection of the Aos as savages and primitive people. The missionary expresses his ideas and perception in such a way that the Aos are presented as colourful people, as exotic hosts of the missionary.

The missionaries appreciated some of the inherent character of the Aos. Writing about the Aos in 1871, E.W. Clark said "These Nagas have a good name for truthfulness, and for general purity of life."<sup>16</sup> To an outsider, the Aos appeared to be lovers of beauty, colour and music. In his reminiscence recorded by A.C. Bowers in *Under Head-Hunters Eyes* E.W. Clark depicts the Aos as colourful people. "The flowers and bits of cotton which were stuck in the holes that were cut through their ears showed a love for beauty. The red and black goats hair on the spear

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<sup>14</sup> Julian Jacob, *The Nagas: Hill People of North-East India*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, p.24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> E.W.Clark's Letter to Dr.Warren dated 5 December, 1871, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record Nagaland.

- shafts also spoke appreciation of colour".<sup>17</sup> Mrs. Mary Mead also gives a vivid description of the Aos as colourful people:

"Amid these exhibitions of taste so degrading and repulsive, we observe with encouragement and delight the slightest evidence of some innate refinement. Men as well as women and children are often seen coming from the jungle or from the day's work with pretty delicate wild flowers, or even a twig of fresh green drawn through the orifice in the ear".<sup>18</sup>

The bright cold season days are frequently enlivened too by hunting and fishing, but the great civil event is the dress parade, when the Military March through the main village streets and on an open space at either end of the village go through their drill, dance and perform many feats of athletics. Dressed in the gayest coloured cloths, caps or bear skins and of bamboo splints decorated with feathers, quills, boar tusks, tufts, and tassels of bamboo shavings and monkey tails, their appearance for the occasion and glittering in the sun, and newly decorated war shields add much to the picturesqueness of the scene.<sup>19</sup>

One may wonder how the Aos who were stereotyped as savages by the Missionary can be lovers of beauty and colour at the same time. The representation of the Aos as lovers of beauty and colours seems to contradict the perception of the Aos as savages. As missionaries tried to move into the deeper level of Ao culture, they found that the Aos presented a picture of contradictions. So the missionaries were contemptuous of Ao savagery, while they eulogized Aos for their love for

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<sup>17</sup> Bowers, *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*, Rev.Clark quoted, p.54.

<sup>18</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.55.

beauty and colour and presented them as exotic people. The records and diaries of the missionaries contain narrative accounts of surprise and delight, their attempt to understand the practices and language of another culture. Mary Mead Clark illustrates an incident on her way to an Ao village: On a little open plateau, our procession came to a halt, and someone started a fire. We exclaimed, 'why we are not going to eat again!' 'No, only make a smoke to notify the village that we are coming'. Naga telegraphy! and that too, wireless, has been practised here for ages! In due time the message was answered by young men and maidens coming hurry scurry down the mountain steeps with bark bands and baskets to divide the loads and relieve their friends.<sup>20</sup>

The Aos' passion for song and dance did not escape the attention of the Missionary.<sup>20</sup> I kept to my chair as my ferry, while my husband's passage was by a Nagas's back without a chair. The Naga burden bearing song with response, Oh- hei! He-hoh! Ha - hei! Ho, hum! with repetition and variation, now sounding on my ears for the first time, was indeed very musical.<sup>21</sup> In spite of their primitiveness, the Aos in the eyes of missionary were not only hard-working people but cheerful: "The Nagas, although a busy, hard working people subject to privation, exposure, and pestilence are not generally melancholy or morose, rather the reverse. Even their village sacrificial offerings are seasons of more or less merriment, and at their springtime and after harvest feasts the blood of bulls and goats flow freely and the supply of rice

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.29.

beer is unlimited”.<sup>22</sup>

A careful observation would reveal that there were two opposite perceptions of the Aos in the eyes of the Missionary. The Missionary perception of the Aos as savage and primitive people was in contradiction of the Missionary depiction of the Aos as colourful and exotic and cheerful people. Christianity could restrain their savagery and help the Aos develop their worthy qualities: “The Nagas once civilized and Christianised, will make a manly worthy people. Their language shows considerable mental capacity”.<sup>23</sup>

The validity of the outsider's account in the observation and perception of a society is often questioned. It is true one should be careful enough not to take the missionary's account of their perception of the Aos as an authorised and definite voice. On the other hand, since the Aos had no written script to record their history, oral tradition has been maintained for generations as the only source of their history. In this context, it would be fair enough to mention that the Missionary depiction of the Aos as savages, barbaric and primitive does not contradict the insider's story of the Aos before Christianity was proclaimed. The missionaries did not confine their perceptions only to the negative traits of the Aos, they also identified a set of positive characteristics of the Aos.

#### **Missionary as Saviour, Aos as Protector:**

The response and reaction of the Aos towards the Missionary is recorded in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp.55-56.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.46.

missionary accounts. It is said that the Aos frequented the plains of Assam for trade and sightseeing. The Aos were fascinated and wonder struck by the various activities that were taking place in the plains. At the same time they were also quite curious about the new religion. The Aos, we are told, stood peering, manifesting much interest at the school conducted by the Missionary. The type setting, printing and binding of books were part of a new world of wonders for the Aos who did not venture out of their village: "They stood peering at all the children who were studying and reciting; 'See', said one smiling, "those children talk to the white and black things they hold in their hands!" The black and white things were books and slates. Aiao! They tell the grown up man the things they say also! It is most wonderful"<sup>24</sup> Attracted by this unusual happening, the Aos invited the Rev. E. W. Clark to come to their village to teach their children. Clark describes how an entire delegation of Aos led by the head chief came and met him:

One day an exceptionally large delegation called at the bungalow some of them I knew, but others had come for the first time. Among the faces was one that especially impressed me. He seemed to show intelligence and power above the ordinary, and I found that he was the head chief of his very powerful village. Sturdy, upstanding and fearless, in the dignity of manhood he stood out from his followers. Stepping forward, after the customary salutations he said: Sir, we are the men from the town of a thousand warriors. We came to request you to return with us in order to teach our children the way of knowledge. Though we ourselves are too old to learn, we will give you our children that you may teach them the new way.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bowers, *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*. Rev.Clark quoted, p.197.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.198-199.

Rev. E.W, Clark expressed his apprehension of working among the Aos because he knew that they were head hunters. When the Aos invited Rev. Clark to come to their village he replied: "I pray that my skull should grin from my own shoulder than my skull should grin in the front of a house! You know that you live in a head hunters paradise, and a white man's head would be such a special prize that mine would desert me in a short time."<sup>26</sup>

At this point the Aos promised him protection, assuring him that no harm would come to him:

In the great council of all the warriors, we considered carefully your fear, my young men reported to me, that on account of the many wars among the villages you fear that your head might be taken in some raid by an enemy. Sir, he spoke with a dignity of power and assurance, we, the men of town of a thousand warriors guarantee to protect you.<sup>27</sup>

From the above account, we can see that a reciprocal relation was forged between the Missionary and the Aos. The Aos requested help from the Missionary after they saw the work carried out by the Missionary in the plains of Assam. The Aos are projected in these accounts as the protector of the Missionaries guaranteeing their safety. The missionary account regarding the Ao invitation legitimises Christianity by presenting it as not being coercive. The story also shows that along with wonder and fascination there was acknowledgement of the power of the word

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.198.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.199.

and knowledge. Most missionary accounts emphasise that the missionaries were welcomed with warmth and honour describing her journey to the hills, Mary Mead wrote:

“Five of the strongest men were detached as my "pullman" (pullmen), one at a time for my bamboo chair. The Chief men, village officials, were also on hand, not to carry loads, on, no ! this would be much beneath their dignity, they were there to give honour to the occasion. Surely never was a queen more revered by her subjects than was now the chief of the Naga Hills Missionary by his parishioners”.<sup>28</sup>

The foregoing account discusses only the positive response of the Aos when they came into contact with the Christian Missionaries. The Missionaries however, faced a mixed reception from the Aos. While some of them were curious and even interested, others were clearly hostile towards the Missionaries. Because the Aos took pride in their independence, they were utterly opposed to any movement that constrained in the least their power and independence. So when the gospel was proclaimed by the American Baptist Missionary, Rev. E. W. Clark among the Aos, the village was divided about the new order of things. The neighbouring villages were deeply suspicious. They said: “you will find sooner or later that this rajah preacher is a disguised agent of the company. Has he not the same white face”?<sup>29</sup> Whiteness linked the missionaries to company officials, and the motives of the company were always suspected.

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<sup>28</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p.29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.17.



Other missionaries who reached the Naga hills with the gospel, faced similar hostility. When Godhula the Assamese assistant of Rev.Clark proclaimed himself as the teacher of new religion and went to the Ao village (Molungkimong) his motives were questioned. "What do we want of this man's new religion? Exclaimed one of the Chief Men, among the first to espouse the cause later on. Godhula heard them say: Send him off, Get him out of the way", "A spy, doubtless of the company".<sup>30</sup>

Godhula was kept in captivity for a couple of days with a guard watching him closely. It was only after he presented the gospel in his own eloquent way, that the people realised that he was no threat to them. But the fear of the white outsiders remained. The Aos, like other tribesmen, are known for their attachment to their tribe. They knew that acceptance of an outsider who is offering a new way of life would mean an encroachment to the tribal life they had lived for ages.

Thus it is evident that a variety of attitudes were expressed by the Aos towards the Missionary. At times they were fascinated by the missionary activities, at times they welcomed and accepted him, at other times they were suspicious and hostile.

Rev.Clark was strongly drawn towards the Aos from the very beginning. He saw the work among these Nagas promising mainly because the people were not exposed to other religions like Islam or Hinduism. Secondly, Rev.Clark had faith in the Aos because he felt that even though the Nagas were wild and warlike people they had a certain substratum of character which would make them worthy people if

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid p.11.

they embrace Christianity. Converting the entire Nagaland was seen as a sacred duty. In 1871 Rev. E.W. Clark wrote, "Tribes upon tribes of Nagas are accessible to the gospel. It is certainly painful for us at Sibsagar to be unable to lift our eyes without seeing these hills and thinking of men on them who have no knowledge of Christ."<sup>31</sup>

Rev.Clark was disappointed with the Mission Work in Assam which was going on at a very slow pace with little or no progress. He saw the Assam Mission 'desperately dark'. As his zeal for the Assam Mission faded, his attention and enthusiasm was directed towards the Naga Hills. After visiting Nagaland and surveying the possibility of mission activity he told his wife: "I believe I have found my life work"<sup>32</sup>

Mrs.Clark at that time was persistently ill in Assam. Rev.Clark felt that the hills would be a better place for his wife. He wrote to the American Baptist Missionary Union in 1873: "Very likely the climate on the crest of these hills would be better for Mrs.Clark."<sup>33</sup> Three years later he wrote in another letter to the American Baptist Missionary Union in 1876. "I deemed the Naga field one of the most promising for Missionary labour and abounding in inhabited situations among the healthiest in the world a combination of two most important considerations probably not found in any other field of the Missionary Union."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> E.W.Clark, *Letter* to Rev.Murdock, dated 21 July, 1871, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record, Nagaland.

<sup>32</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, Rev.Clark quoted, p.15.

<sup>33</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark to Rev.Murdock, dated 14 June, 1873, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record, Nagaland.

<sup>34</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark, to Secretary of the Missionary Union dated 29 June, 1876, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record, Nagaland.

The Missionaries realised that to gain a lasting foothold among the Aos, they should place themselves in close proximity to the people, assuring them that their destiny is guided by men of principle. The Missionaries also saw the necessity of forging ties with the people. Rev. Clark joined the Aos in an elephant hunt during a time of famine. His report reveals the politics of his collective venture.

On every little eminence of their homeward journey they halted, formed a circle and shouted when within about a mile of the village, the telephone prevailed and down the hill, pelt-mell, came the village in force, men, women, and children with flaming torches, and yells of welcome. There was meat enough now to tide the people over the famine to the reaping time. This may seem a small matter, but it proved a strong tie in binding the people to their religious teacher.<sup>35</sup>

The missionary presented the new religion tactfully. He made the Aos admit that their conditions were lamentable and it could be improved if they accepted what the missionary was offering them. The missionary did not straight away preach the gospel but rather tried to attract the people by demonstrating the prospects and advantages that came along with Christianity. Through this process the missionaries sought to affirm not only the Christian faith but also the authority of the western mind over the Aos.

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<sup>35</sup> Clark, *A Corner in India*, p. 80.

## CHAPTER-II

### APPROPRIATING THE AO PAST IN THE CHRISTIAN PRESENT

This chapter focuses on the nature of representation of the Ao religion by the Ao Christian themselves. It discusses how Ao Christian scholars appropriate their past, how they show the compatibility of the Ao religion and Christianity, and how they legitimise their traditional religion in the light of Christianity.

Before studying the traditional Ao religion, it has to be noted that Ao religion was never presented in black and white. Its concepts and ideas were passed from one generation to another orally in the form of myths, legends and songs. These ideas and concepts were recovered, codified and recounted by the Ao Christian scholars only after Christianity came to Nagaland. My discussion of Ao Christian views concentrates on the following accounts:<sup>1</sup>

Ao myths and legends are important in the relocation and interpretation of the values, laws and philosophy. They give us an insight into what the people believed. Myths and legends also place a claim to the purity of origin of the Ao religion. In this context, an attempt will be made to read the structure of myths and legends as coded messages which offer the model of belief and action of the Aos.

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Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*. Har Anand Publication New Delhi, 1993; O.Alem.Ao: *Tsungromology: Ao Christian Theology*, Clark Theological College, Aolijen Mokokchung Nagaland, 1994; C.Wallu.Walling, *Sacrifice and Salvation in Ao- Naga Tradition: A Theological Perspective*, Impur, Nagaland, 1997; Tajen.Ao. *Christianity Versus Ao Nagas*, Tribal Gospel Mission Publishers Mokokchung Nagaland, 1984; Wati.A.Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity*, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat Assam, 1995.

As it is in most cases of the history of unlettered people, to discover the meanings of Ao religion based on oral tradition is entirely different from constructing a history of people who have written and recorded history. Since the Nagas did not possess any script, they consider their verbal art as the legacy and bearers of their past. So the legends and myths are actually the core of their life. These constitute their art, ethics and history. So the Aos are very cautious while interpreting and presenting a myth or a tale, because they feel that any mistake made in presenting their past may give a wrong picture of the entire society.

The importance of the oral tradition in constructing the history of the unlettered people is recognised by Vijaya Ramaswamy in her article *Weaver Folk Traditions as a Source of History*. She says " Folk songs and folk tales and even riddles and proverbs are in fact living history. They are evidence set in the present but relating to some important past event or events in the life of a caste or community. In the use of oral tradition, one proceeds from the known to the less known in the task of historical construction".<sup>2</sup> The life of the Aos before the intervention of Christianity was knitted with the threads of a series of ritual practices and myths. This in turn enhanced and recreated the collective consciousness of the people safeguarding and enforcing morality. The myths as such does not reflect reality directly but through the prism of thought which survive in the memory of people. Myth on the other hand is also a sacred narrative because it is not only believed to be true but it expresses the faith and belief of the people. Thus the importance of myth

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<sup>2</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy, "Weaver Folk Traditions as a Source of History", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIX, No.I, p.47.

and legend in understanding Ao religion lies in the fact that like any genuine art, they are the symbolic features of social and religious reality of the existence of the people.

So how do the Ao Christian scholars make sense of their traditional religion. According to their understanding, the concept of religion is understood as 'Yimsu'. 'Yim' means 'village' and 'Su' means 'shawl'.<sup>3</sup> Thus 'Yimsu' {religion} is understood and interpreted as something that covers the whole village and its inhabitants. Religion for the Aos is seen as a binding factor for the whole community. There is no particular name for Ao religion because it is not constricted only to their ritual life but it is the very basis of their existence. "For them the total or the whole being of a person comes under the preview of religion and as such an Ao cannot conceive the world apart from religion".<sup>4</sup>

Another Ao Christian scholar, Panger Imchen is of the opinion that the traditional life of the Aos should not be identified with only one aspect of emotional, spiritual or social life. He feels that one's religious philosophy gives and controls one's attitude to political, social and cultural systems. Thus Ao religion should be comprehended in terms of the roles it play in the socio-cultural system of the people. "The role of religion in an individual's life is the prototype of the role of religion in the socio-cultural system of a people".<sup>5</sup>

### **Concept of God in Traditional Ao Religion:**

In the writings of Ao Christians the traditional Ao concept of God appear very similar to Christian concept of the divine. This section will look at the process of

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<sup>3</sup> C.Walu Walling, *Sacrifice and Salvation in Ao Naga Tradition: A Theological Perspective*. Impur. Nagaland, 1997, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp.7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Panger Imchen. *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, Har Anand Publication, New Delhi, 1993, p.31.

## Christianization of Ao past.

One of the most significant features of the Traditional Ao religion as presented by the Ao Christian scholars is the idea of 'Supreme God' be it animate or inanimate. The principal name for God in Ao is 'Tsongrem'. We may probe some of the interpretations of 'Tsongrem' as given by experts on Ao religion. Imtilepden, a leading authority on traditional Ao religion says 'Tsong' in Tsongrem is the stem of 'tsung' (feet) and 'rem' means 'arem' (concealment).<sup>6</sup> So according to his understanding 'Tsongrem' means 'Tetsungzung nung arem' (concealment or disappearance within the feet). O.Alem who is also a renowned Ao Christian theologian observes that this interpretation is derived from the Ao experience of ghosts, who are said to have disappeared suddenly; this is not applicable to the Ao concept of God because God is a living God for the Aos.

We may also consider the definition of 'Tsongrem' as given by Rev. E.W.Clark. According to him 'Tsongrem' is a general deity, of which Nagas have many. The Tsung in Tsongrem maybe called to be Tsung in Mozing and Longkitsungba, the 'rem' is probably the stem of the arem which means concealed, invisible. It recalls the name of Ram, one of the great Hindu deities."<sup>7</sup> In another section Clark points out 'Tsong' in 'zungi' and mungsen dialect suggests an idea of divine, heavenly, or supernatural as indicated in 'Tsongi' (thunderbolt) 'Tsongpet' (lightning) 'Tsongmok' (thunder) etc. Rev.Clark's interpretation of 'Tsongrem', however does not give us the full meaning of the word 'Tsongrem.'

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The most accepted interpretation of 'Tsongrem' is the one offered by Rev.

<sup>6</sup> C.Walu Walling, *Sacrifice and Salvation in Ao Naga Tradition: A Theological Perspective*, Impur, Nagaland, 1997, p.17.

<sup>7</sup> E.W.Clark, *Ao Naga Dictionary* Calcutta Baptist Mission Press, 1911, p.901.



Takusangba as mentioned by O.Alem in his book *Tsungremology: A Naga Christian Theology*. According to Rev. Takusangba Tsung in Tsungrem means unger (chief) or tematiba (supreme) and rem is the common name for gods (lesser gods).<sup>8</sup> According to his understanding Tsungrem would mean chief of all gods. Rev. Takusangba's view about Tsungrem seems to be the most convincing.

Thus we have different interpretations of 'Tsongrem' in Ao religion each giving certain clues about the existence of 'Tsongrem'. Based on this understanding about 'Tsongrem' one may come to the conclusion that for the Aos 'Tsongrem' literally means concealed chief. Which is to say that the Ao concept of God introduces a supreme God who is transcendent, one who cannot be seen with man's naked eyes. As chief, 'Tsongrem' is the owner of the whole universe by whose power everything exists."<sup>9</sup>

The significance of God (Tsongrem) in Ao religion is summed up by Panger Imchen in his book *Ancient Ao Naga religion and Culture*. He suggests, "For the Aos, God is always personal, working actively in the nature of the universe. This mysterious and overpowering Tsungrem, God, is fascinating and not reducible to any other power. Before Tsungrem, an Ao stands in fear and reverence and yet turned to him for protection, security and well being and blessing".<sup>10</sup>

So, according to the understanding of the Ao Christians scholars 'Tsongrem' may be taken as a principle name for God. Several names attributed to God by the Aos indicate that He is real for them and that God is not an abstract concept. Particularly so, because the

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<sup>8</sup> O.Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, Clark Theological College. Aolijen, Nagaland, 1994, p.27.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 27-28.

<sup>10</sup> Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.32.



concept of God is supposed to convey the purest expression of the Ao religious thinking and their religious experience.

### **Functional Names of God in Ao Religion:**

The Aos gave different functional names to describe the nature and character of God, this will be discussed in this section.

#### **Lijaba Tsungrem (creator of the earth)**

Lijaba is one of the functional names of God emphasising his mundane nature. Lijaba Tsungrem has a great significance in the everyday life of the people because Lijaba is believed to be the creator of the earth. C. Walu suggests, "The word Lijaba or Lizaba is derived from the concept of world maker. He is recognised as the supreme ruler of the earth, or the word may mean earth walker. The derivate meaning of Lijaba is taken as Li-  
alima (the earth) and jaba-jajaba (the walker) or 'jijiba' (the real one)"<sup>11</sup> The Aos belief in Lijaba as creator of the earth is embodied in a myth. It is said that Lijaba at first worked steadily in his act of creation and he took time to make the plains of Assam smooth and level. But as Lijaba started to mould the Naga hills, the sea beetle came from nowhere and warned him saying "enemies, enemies! Hurry, Hurry! Enemies are approaching to destroy the earth." The story goes on to say that Lijaba moulded the Naga hills hastily and roughly making it uneven and hilly and leaving it unfinished, Lijaba went to fight the enemy. The myth draws a crucial contrast between the Assam plains and the Naga hills and also suggest that outsiders have been the enemies of Aos.

Creation myths of other societies also speak about the presence of evil in the act

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<sup>11</sup> Walling, *Sacrifice and Salvation in Ao Naga Tradition: A Theological Perspective*, p.20.

of creation by God. For instance, A.W.Reed, in his book, *Myths and legends of Australia* talks of the Australian aborigines myth about creation. According to the legend, in the beginning the world was in utter darkness with no vegetation waiting for the soft touch of life and light of the sun goddess Yhi who was sleeping. The great spirit Baiame stirred Yhi from her sleep and she floated down to the earth and the earth leapt in ecstasy when her feet rested on the ground. Yhi's tracks crossed and recrossed until the whole earth was clothed with vegetation. "The works of creation is well begun", Baiame said, "but it has only begun. The world is full of beauty, but it needs dancing life to fulfill its destiny. Take your light into the cavern of earth and see what will happen".<sup>12</sup> Yhi rose and made her way into the gloomy spaces beneath the surface. Harsh shadows lurked behind the light. Evil spirits shouted, "no, no, no, "until the cavern vibrated with voices that boomed and echoed in the darkness." sleep, sleep, sleep" the evil spirits wailed, but the shapes had been waiting for the caressing warmth of the sun goddess. Flimsy wings opened, body raised themselves on long legs, metallic colours began to glow. Soon Yhi was surrounded by myriads of insects, creeping, flying, swarming from every dark corner. She retreated slowly. They followed her into the world, into the sunshine, into the embrace of the waiting grass and leaves and flowers. The evil chanting died away and was lost in confusion of vain echoes and Yhi proceeded to finish the act of creation.

The notion of evil is quite significant in both the Ao and Australian myths. We find the evil spirit trying to disrupt Yhi's act of creation but with great spirit Baiame on her side, she overcame the evil spirit. In the Ao myth, in his act of creation, Lijaba is disturbed by the evil force which he had to combat. From these two myths one can discern that there is

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<sup>12</sup> A.W.Reed, *Myths and Legends of Australia*, A.H and A.W.Reed, Sydney. 1965. p.15.

always a tussle between the good and the evil with the evil trying to bring chaos and confusion. But ultimately good triumphs over evil.

Coming back to the Ao myth about Lijaba, O.Alem writes, "The myth about Lijaba may be interpreted as the personification of the earth, as the soil (earth) is an essential element of the sustenance of men. It may also be interpreted as the hermeneutical language that attempts to express man's experience of the supernatural power that controls the earth".<sup>13</sup> Alem gives the literal meaning of Lijaba in Mongsen (one of the major Ao dialects). He suggest 'Li' means 'alima' or 'lima' (earth or country) and 'Jaba' means 'to mark off the land'. Thus, according to Alem, Lijaba would mean the one who goes out to survey the country or the earth for a definite purpose. In this sense, Lijaba may mean one who surveys the earth in order to do something out of it. Lijaba may also mean, one who enters the earth just as a seed gets buried beneath the soil soon to germinate into a vital life for the benefit of mankind. In this sense, Lijaba is also understood as God of fertility in Ao religion.

#### **Lungkitsungba (Lord of sky):**

Lungkitsungba was the lord of the sky. According to C.Walu Walling, the root word 'Lungki' means 'stone house' and 'Tsung' means chief or supreme who lives in a stone house. Walling suggests that for the Aos, stone is not just a mere stone because it represents the quality of strength, stability and prominence. These terms are used to describe the nature of God in the Ao religion . Again Lungkitsungba is also called 'anungtsungba' because he is believed to live in the sky. Here 'Anung' (sky) is said to represent infiniteness, changelessness, everlasting, omnipresence- all the qualities which

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<sup>13</sup> O.Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.57.

expresses the nature of God who protects every thing under His control. The Tsung not only resides in the stone house but he himself is the rock of security, protection and salvation of all men.

This acknowledgement of God as a protector, a rock of security is similar to the Christian concept of God as we find in the Bible. In the Old Testament the Psalmist King David says "Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead me and guide me".<sup>14</sup> In these verses King David is acknowledging God as his rock who is his fortress, protector and refuge.

**Meyutsung (Lord over the dead):**

"The name Meyutsung comes from the root 'Meyu' which means thousands. It is commonly referred to a countless number."<sup>15</sup> The suffix Tsung means chief or supreme. For the Aos Meyutsung is the Lord over the dead. He is believed to be the god of truth and justice. The Aos believed that everyone will be judged at the court of Meyutsung and this belief can be authenticated by looking into a very popular Ao myth. According to this myth, the Aos believed that after death everyone will stand before Meyutsung for judgement. Everyone will throw his spear which should embed in the tree called Tsungchidong (tree of truth), while every woman throws her weaving baton at the same tree. If it hits 'tsungchidong' they will go through the fire place of Meyutsungba's kitchen as a symbol of truthfulness. But those who miss the tree will go another way outside Meyutsungba's house and roam endlessly in a muddy place full of thistles and thorns. So,

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<sup>14</sup> Psalms 31:2-3, Holy Bible, New International Version. Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>15</sup> O.Alem Ao. *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.67.

the Aos in the ancient days tried their best to live a virtuous and blameless life. They believed that even richness, valour and sacrifice cannot save them when they stand before the judgement seat of Meyutsungba.

Religious beliefs in Africa also have the notion of God as the supreme judge. John S.Mbiti is of the opinion that, the notion of God as judge also strengthens traditional ethical sanctions. The Azande of Africa addresses God as the one who settles the difference between men. Mbiti gives a series of examples regarding the African notion of God as supreme judge:

“For the Elguyo, lightning is God's weapon by means of which He destroys people who secretly wrong their neighbours. The Nube believe that God punishes those who contravene national traditions since He is thought to be the Guardian of the traditions. It is a firm belief among the Nuer that God punishes what is wrong and rewards what is right. For the Ovambo, rudeness to elderly people, murder and stealing are punished by God”.<sup>16</sup>

So we see that African people also conceive of God as a supreme judge who acts with impartiality.

If we analyse carefully, the Ao myth about Meyutsung's judgment is similar to that of the Christian concept of God's judgement. The Christian doctrine teaches that everyone will be judged by God according to the kind of life a person lives on earth. The Aos believed that those who did not live a righteous life would be banished by Meyutsung to a place full of thistles and thorns. This theme is not very different from the Christian belief that anyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life is to be cast into fire. We

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<sup>16</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.46.

may take a reference to Christian concept of God's judgement as mentioned in the Bible:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they have done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and the death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If any one's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that every person is accountable before the judgement seat of Meyutsung indicates the Ao idea of God as the perfect one before whom every individual shall give account of his deeds. According to O. Alem "Meyutsung convey the nature of God as the God of justice. He demands justice from all men. He rewards those who live an honest life but punishes the dishonest. He counts all as of equal value before Him (God). God is believed to be the ultimate revealer of truth and falsehood."<sup>18</sup>

Thus the foregoing discussion about attributes of God in Ao religion reveals a how the appropriation of tradition by the Ao Christian scholars made Ao religion similar to Christian faith. The missionaries did not confront a faith totally opposed to theirs. Or so the Ao Christians argue.

### **Concept of Divinity and Spirits in Traditional Ao Religion:**

According to the Ao Christian scholars, the term 'divinity' maybe understood as the objectification or manifestations of Tsungrem (God) through natural phenomenon and objects. It should be understood that the Aos specified particular and concrete acts of God

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<sup>17</sup> Revelation 20:12-15. *Holy Bible*, NIV, Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>18</sup> Alem Ao. *Tsungremology: Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.74.

Tsungrem by giving names to all the manifestations of God. i.e. God of such and such manifestation or act. O.Alem says:

In a pre-scientific environment, worshipping many objects satisfied them because this evoked in them something wholly other. Their immediate concern was the well being of life in community keeping in good relationship with the one who controls them and nature. They were less concerned about the unity of all these manifestations. All they knew was that, these are the acts of the one who controls the whole universe whom they simply called Tsungrem.<sup>19</sup>

The main concern for the Aos was whether these manifestations can fulfil the mundane needs of man. The Aos offered prayers and sacrifices to Tsungrem calling him by different names. For example 'Kimong Tsungrem (God of house site) Yim Tsungrem (God of village) etc. But it did not mean that the Aos worshipped different deities. In all this worship they acknowledged and recognised the presence of the Supreme God, the creator of the universe. In fact, though many descriptive terms were used in their prayers, ultimately all prayers were directed to the Supreme God. In this context O. Alem contends **I**n all these 'localised worships' and the names given accordingly we see how the progenitors of the Aos attempted to interpret God who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, in a language understandable to the people of their own tribe."<sup>20</sup> Thus it should be understood that divinities are not different lesser gods but they are manifestations of the Supreme God. These name are nothing but local forms of expression of one divine being.

The Aos believed in the existence of an impersonal supernatural being called 'Tanula' (spirits). The Aos believed that there are two kinds of spirits - malevolent spirits

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.86.

who are responsible for causing sickness, sudden death etc. and benevolent spirits who help men in various ways. The spirits are not worshipped by the AOs. They are propitiated as and when necessary. Necessary offerings have to be made to appease them since all sickness and misfortune are believed to be caused by some spirits. The AO belief in the existence of a Supreme God and in spirits is again, at one level, similar to that of the African cosmology. Robin Horton in his essay *On the Rationality of Conversion* writes about the basic African cosmology which has a two tier structure, the first tier being that of the lesser spirits and the second that of the Supreme being. Horton says:

“The lesser spirits underpin events and processes in the microcosm of the local community and its environment, the supreme being underpins events and processes in the macrocosm – i.e. in the world as a whole. As the microcosm forms part of the macrocosm, so the lesser spirits are thought of, either as manifestations of the Supreme being, or as entities ultimately deriving their power from him”.<sup>21</sup>

According to Horton as long as the way of life of a society is dominated by subsistence farming and commerce is poorly developed, the social relations of the people of a particular area are likely to be largely confined by the boundaries of their microcosm. In this kind of situation a great deal of attention is paid to the lesser spirits while very little attention is paid to the Supreme being.

So how do we apply Horton's theory of lesser spirits and Supreme God to the traditional AO religion. The point of similarity in both African and AO cosmologies about the lesser spirits is that they are thought of either as manifestations of the supreme being

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Horton, “On the Rationality of Conversion”, *AFRICA Journal of International African Institute*, Vol.45, No.3, 1975, pp.219-220.



or as entities ultimately deriving their power from Him. A careful analysis would reveal that in the Ao cosmology, a greater attention was given to the Supreme God than to the lesser spirits. The Aos did not deny the existence and activities of the spirits but they knew very well that the spirits cannot save them from all crisis. Though the Aos acknowledged the existence of spirits, they thought that the ultimate answer to man's need is the Supreme God alone. According to O. Alem one of the major areas of confusion in Ao religion is the relationship between divinity and the spirits. For this he makes a clear distinction between the two. "Spirits belong to a separate category in themselves within God's manifestation. Spirits in general are considered malevolent, while divinities are generally benevolent. While the manifestation of the spirits produce fear, manifestation of divinities produce 'awe' in men."<sup>22</sup>

Panger Imchem is of the opinion the Aos accepted the existence of the supernatural and middle powers and their influence on human existence, but they believed that man has the power to exploit and manipulate such higher phenomena by averting their power over man. "Above all, it is said that the Aos have a clear concept of God Almighty above all deities, spirits and supernatural powers. The various names to Tsungrem are given to one eternal God, the all powerful, Almighty, the highest above whom is one and whose manifestation is expressed in various ways according to human reflections of the Supreme God."<sup>23</sup>

### **The Original State of Man and God and their Separation in Ao Religion:**

There are several Ao myths about the original state of man and God before they

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<sup>22</sup> Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.90.

<sup>23</sup> Imchen, *Ancient AoNaga Religion and Culture*, p.45.

were separated. According to a very popular Ao myth, man, tiger and God lived happily together speaking the same language. The myth talks about the separation of the three of them over differences in diet. The tiger preferred raw meat, man preferred cooked meat and God had a taste for roasted meat of the tender portion. The conflict lead to separation: man chose to live in light, the tiger chose to live in darkness and god chose both darkness and light. God fixed a piece of cotton on the eyeballs of man so that he could not see him. He asked man to worship him and offer him live animals brought in a basket and He would bless and protect man in return. From this myth O. Alem, an Ao christian scholar tries to bring out some theological significance in the Ao religion. According to him, man represents humanity, tiger represents all creatures except man and God the Supreme being. The difference in diet would mean difference in their interest and purpose. God fixing cotton on the man's eyeballs indicates the loss of man's ability to gain and understand God's knowledge; God became an invisible being because of man's own wrong choice. The origin of worship and offering of sacrifice to God in Ao religion can be traced to this myth. Alem discerns that something had gone wrong with man and the universe and because they did not enjoy perfect bliss, man's original life has been interrupted. He also suggests, "It is perhaps here that the Christian doctrine of the fall may serve as a point of contact for the Ao understanding of the present state of man's life."<sup>24</sup>

The Africans have a similar myth about the separation between God and man. There is a slight variation in the myths, but they have the same basic connotation. According to the Ashanti, God lived quite near to the earth. While pounding the traditional food fufu, a woman lifted her wooden pestle high into the air, hitting the sky see did not

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<sup>24</sup> Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*. p.39.

hear God calling out to her to stop. So God moved away in order to avoid being knocked. The sky has been ever since been at this height. From this myth, John S.Mbiti draws the following conclusion: "God withdrew from men, partly because of man's disobedience to him, partly through the severing of link between heaven and earth."<sup>25</sup>

### **Ceremonies and Rituals:**

Panger Imchen writes:"Ceremonies, rites and sacrifices are the carriers of tradition and media of religious expression. Ceremonies make individuals conscious of themselves as a group affirming their belief in common symbols. Rituals maintain cohesion protecting their identity as a community."<sup>26</sup>

The traditional Ao religion is incomplete without ceremonies and rituals. For a better understanding of the traditional Ao religion, we may look into the significance of ceremonies and rituals of the Ao.

### **Tsungremong:**

Tsungremong celebration is addressed to Lijaba whom the Aos believe to be the creator of the world by whose power the earth nourishes vegetation. The Ao take every care to see that there is no lapse in the celebration of Tsungremong. There are variations from village to village in the celebration of Tsungremong. Usually a pig is killed ceremonially by the village priest and each family is given five pieces of meat. The same evening every household fixes 'tsungpet' (a kind of shrub having strong odour) on the door as an act of sanctification.

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<sup>25</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p.98.

<sup>26</sup> Imchen, *Ancient AoNaga Religion and Culture*, p.10.

Tradition says on that particular night Lijaba passes by every house in the village and if tsungpet is not found, he sends sickness and misfortune to that particular household. The next morning all the families eat the meat distributed the previous day saying:

Tetzu tebu nungi nai onok ajak moaja aruba onok chia jemdi

Shilu manemtsu tarudaktsu ni

Asu-ama tarudaktsu ni

Nai onok moajang.

[That which you have been blessing us since forefathers, we are feasting together

Let no sickness come to us

Let no death visit us

May you bless us].

From the manner in which Tsungremong is celebrated, Ao Christian scholars underline some basic elements in the Ao concept of worship. Community meal is seen as an expression of oneness before God who is worthy to be praised and honoured. The nature of Tsungremong celebration expresses a sense of immediate awareness of the presence of God in Ao religion. Tsungpet is symbolised as the Aos outward sign of their inner consecration to God.

### **Feast of Merit:**

The feast of merit or Su achiba (Mithun sacrifice) is one of the major religious festivals of the Aos attributed to the supreme God Lungkitsungba who is believed to be the dispenser of life. The feast of merit has both social and religious significance. The social significance of the feast of merit lies in the fact that a person who is able to perform this ceremony is given a number of social honours. He is given the right to wear special

clothes, the right to special decoration of the house and special songs called 'narokum' (song of achievement) are sung for him which ascribe the highest symbol of status for a man in Ao society in ancient days.

Both C.Walu Walling and O.Alem Ao agree that feast of merit is much more than socially significant because its primary purpose is to acknowledge God's blessing and rededicate lives through the sacrifice of mithun. Thus the procedure of feast of merit has many religious dimensions. The person who gives the feast of merit calls all his relatives and says: "God since you have blessed us not of our unfair means of income. Not because of our wealth, but because of moon and sun gave us, God you blessed us, therefore out of your blessings upon our labour do we make offering."<sup>27</sup>

Since feast of merit is a sacred matter, the husband and wife who give the feast observe genna until the final concluding day of the feast with every single step marked by offerings, restrictions and rituals of purification. The Aos believe that if religious restrictions and personal purity are not observed their blessing would be denied by God.

### **Concept of Worship in Ao Religion:**

According to Panger Imchen "As in any other religion, Aos have a systematic procedure of worship. It is a process of direct contact between the divine and human, therefore strict rules and procedures are to be observed."<sup>28</sup> In the traditional Ao religion there is no priestly clan. The oldest man in the village performs religious rites. There is a council of priests called 'pati' which is comprised of a group of elders drawn from each

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<sup>27</sup> O.Alem.Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.55.

<sup>28</sup> Imchen, *Ancient AoNaga Religion and Culture*, p.67.

clan. Priesthood is ordered according to the nature of worship, in family affairs, clan affairs and communal affairs. Since the priest represents the whole community, he is expected to observe genna prior to, and during as well as after worship. Worship and priesthood in traditional Ao religion is marked by concentration, meditation, sanctity and consecration.

The foregoing discussion reveals some of the concepts and ideas of the traditional Ao religion as presented by the Ao christian scholars. They attempt to explain the essence of socio-cultural values in the traditional Ao religion and present it as a well organised, doctinated and reasonable religious system which was compatible with christianity.

#### **Critiquing Outsiders' Observation on Ao Religion:**

In this section, an attempt will be made to show how the Ao christian scholars critique the observations and assumptions of outsiders about Ao religion.

In the opinion of Ao christian scholars ignorance about the Ao religion resulting from bigoted ethnocentrism has led the 'outsiders' to reduce the traditional Ao religion to nothing. Sometimes their failure to understand the content of the traditional Ao religion has led them to label it as primitive and disorganised. According to the Ao Christian scholars, the missionaries identified Ao religion with only one aspect of emotional, spiritual or social life. Moreover, for the most part, the missionaries assumed that only those worships which are approved in their home churches have universal validity. Wati Longchar writes:

Anything that does not conform to the western world view is classified as

"devilish", "irrational", "inhuman", "inferior", "backward", "primitive", and so forth. Since in the tribal religion and culture, the earth is central, their religion is described as the earliest stage of religious consciousness. Hence almost every tribal religion has been designated by the colonizers, missionaries, students of anthropology, sociology, comparative religion, and theology as a religion without any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after Rev. E.W.Clark came into contact with the Aos he wrote to the American Baptist Missionary Union about the religion of the Aos: "They are religious or rather superstitious, but their religion amounts to little."<sup>30</sup> According to the Ao Christian scholars this kind of observation has no validity. The traditional Ao religion cannot be just dismissed as amounting to little because Aos have their own view of life conceived in their philosophy of religion as discussed precisely in the previous section. The religious philosophy of the Aos may not have answers to everyone's satisfaction or for every query of life, but it is to be noted that no philosophy of life can answer the inner search of a people better than the indigenous one.

To western outsiders Aos were primitive; and religion according to nineteenth century anthropology, centred around the worship of nature. Mary Mead Clark wrote in her book *A corner in India*: "The sun and moon are regarded as deities and are occasionally worshipped."<sup>31</sup> The Ao Christian scholars dismiss this kind of observation and seek to explain the symbolic value of the sun and moon in Ao

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<sup>29</sup> A.Wati.Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity*, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, 1995, p.9.

<sup>30</sup> E.W.Clark letter dated to Dr.Warren, dated 9 December, 1871, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Records, Nagaland.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1907, p.5.

religion. For instance, O Alem, suggests that the sun and moon have deep religious meaning because they are symbolic representations of God. When the Aos address the sun and the moon as God himself, they do not objectify God. "To them the sun and the moon describe the mysterious nature and quality of God and his relationship with man and nature. Thus God is the all seeing, life giver, protector, dispeller of fear, sustainer of all things, regulator of life, faithful and good".<sup>32</sup>

John Mbiti suggests that in the African religion the notion of sun was considered to be a manifestation of God Himself. In Africa, for peoples like the Aken, Ankore, Igbira, sunshine is one of the expressions of God's providence. "The Illa, the Baluba and others liken God's eternal nature to the apparent endurance of the sun, calling Him 'He is of the Suns', or 'He is of many suns'. Gods eternity is compared to the sun of many suns. He endures, and His eternal nature makes Him impervious to change and limitation."<sup>33</sup>

Thus in both cases we find that there is no concrete indication to show that neither the Aos nor the Africans considered sun to be God. At best they both associate God with many natural objects and phenomenon, indicating their belief that God is involved in creation. Their belief indicates that there is no space or time in which God cannot be found since He is contemporaneous with all things. The traditional Ao religion was criticized as being devoid of any ethical values. For instance, J. P. Mills in his monograph *The Ao Nagas* observed "The religion of the Aos is not a moral

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<sup>32</sup> Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.39.

<sup>33</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp.35-36.



code. It is a system of ceremonies."<sup>34</sup> Such observation according to the Ao Christian scholars is generally made by those who differentiate religions into higher and lower categories attributing the higher ones as the only ethical religion. The Ao Christian scholars contend that the Ao concept of God as Meyutsung (God of truth and justice) has great ethical impact on the lives of the Aos.

Panger Imchen writes in his book *Ancient Ao Naga religion and culture* "Meyutsung is God of righteousness and he demands a just life, purity, high moral and ethical standards, honesty and humility, an Ao traditionally is known to be honest and faithful".<sup>35</sup> The Aos believed everyone is accountable in the court of Meyutsung who does not know forgiveness. He only knows how to judge right from the wrong. Often the younger generations are exhorted by the elders: "Be honest in all that you do because no one can escape the court of Meyutsung". Meyutsung is invoked in all the disputes because he is considered as God of justice, O.Alem contends "The Ao understanding of moral life is not passive but active".<sup>36</sup> Because the concept of Meyutsung teaches the seriousness and consequences of the failure to recognise the authority of Meyutsung. So, according Ao christian scholars, it is obvious that the ancient Aos had a high degree of moral and ethical life based on this kind of philosophy of life.

Another misleading description of the Ao religion according to Ao christian scholars, is spirit worship. According to O.Alem, this misleading term is due to the

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<sup>34</sup> J.P.Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Oxford University Press, (1926: 1973), p.215.

<sup>35</sup> Imchen, *Ancient AoNaga Religion and Culture*, p.35.

<sup>36</sup> Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.73.

misunderstanding of the Ao usage of the word Tsungrem as spirit. In Ao religion, spirit can be one of the natures of God but spirits are not God. As mentioned earlier, the Aos did not worship spirits but they were propitiated. The Aos took for granted the existence of spirits. They believed that spirits helped men indirectly in the sense that they helped men to know God who is the ultimate helper of mankind. Since the spirits have no existence of their own, they derive their existence only from God. Their power is meaningless without God.

Here again Ao Concept of spirit is linked to the christian concept of God which says spirit is one of God's nature. In the Gospel of John chapter 4 Verse 24 (John 4:24), we read, "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."<sup>37</sup> God as spirit is seen here as an aspect of God's nature, who cannot be seen but his presence felt in every aspect of life. Panger Imchen also brings out the theological significance of spirit in Ao religion when he says: "When the missionaries taught that it was the Holy Spirit that blesses and protects man, it is not difficult for an Ao convert to recognise such a good spirit in terms of their ancient tradition. They already had a concept of a bad spirit responsible for ill fortune, and the good spirit"<sup>38</sup>

Ao Christian scholars, by accepting the power of christianity critique the outsiders' view of Ao religion. They try to reinterpret Ao religion and bring to light various hidden theological meanings embedded in it. Thus making a claim to a meaningful past they argued against the association of Ao religion with primitive

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<sup>37</sup> John 4:24, *Holy Bible*, NIV, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>38</sup> Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, p.39.

nature and spirit worship, and present Ao religion as a coherent body of thought that ensured an ethical and moral order.

### **Forging Links Between Ao Religion and Christianity:**

There is one common focus in all the writings of the Ao Christian scholars regarding their traditional religion. All of them try to build a link between their traditional religion and Christianity. They identify and interpret some of the basic concepts and ideas of the traditional Ao religion and establishes an affinity between christianity and Ao religion. Christianity does not appear as totally alien. And Ao conversion to christianity appears comprehensible.

Almost all the Ao Christian scholars agree that the similarity between the Ao concept of God and the christian concept of God was one of the aspects that made the Aos open to Christianity. The ancient Ao religion according to Panger Imchen “Was actually a monotheism like Christianity. The different names are given at different occasions according to different activities.”<sup>39</sup> Dr.Renthy Keitzar, a renowned Ao theologian also observed that the tribal peoples belief in a High God, who is both personal and creator, and its similarity to Biblical thinking makes it easy for them to accept the Christian idea of God. The point of contention that can be drawn from the above views is that, since Ao religion had a definite concept of a supreme God, it was not very difficult for the Missionaries to present the gospel and Christianity idea of God to the Aos.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.70.

According to the understanding of the Ao Christian scholars another concept that was already embedded in the traditional Ao religion which made the interpretation of the gospel to the Aos was God becoming man, or God coming to the world in the form of man. So when the Missionaries started teaching God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and God has come into this world, an Ao was not surprised. Because the Aos already had a mindset of the Almighty God has revealed to mankind in Lijaba, the creator God.

The Aos believed that Lijaba come to visit his people in human form. Legend says Lijaba visited them once disguised as an old man, almost naked and having sores all over the body. Everyone in the village refused to take in until he came to the house of two orphan sisters who gave him food and shelter. The next morning before Lijaba left, he cursed the fields of all the other villagers but blessed the field of the two sisters. Later on only the villagers came to know that the old man whom they turned away was none other than Lijaba.

From this myth, the Ao Christian scholars bring out some theological significance of the Aos concern for strangers. They contend that the initial acceptance of Christianity was not because of what the missionaries taught or who they were, but because of the traditional Ao belief regarding the encounter with Lijaba. Aos did not wish to hurt the sentiments of the strange looking missionaries who came with the new religion.

According to Panger Imchen both in the cases of Ao religion and the Christian idea of incarnation of God, there is a promise of a better future in accepting the

incarnate God "In Christianity, it is a fact that those who accept Christ receive eternal life while in ancient Ao faith it is evident that those who accepted the incarnate Lijaba were blessed with plentiful harvest and wealth".<sup>40</sup> From this story of Lijaba visiting his people, and the teaching of gospel, Aos developed a theology of humility and humanity, concern and acceptance of the poor and unwanted.

Another concept of the traditional Ao religion, as presented by christian scholars which has corresponding ideas within Christianity is the concept of life after death and the concept of heaven and hell. "It was not strange therefore for them (Aos) to hear of heaven and hell and life after death from Christian missionaries. Rather it was a confirmation of their ancient concept and belief and fulfilment of their age long traditional belief and value system when the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached."<sup>41</sup>

The Ao Christian scholars do not only identify the themes and concepts of Ao religion that are similar to Christian doctrine. They also point to some Christian concepts that were lacking in Ao religion. But the lack of such concepts in Ao religion made the people accept the Christian faith to fill the void. The Ao Christian scholars admit that there is no scope for forgiveness in the Ao religion. It promised no bright future for the Aos since life was based on the concept of blessing for righteousness and punishment of the wicked, providing no room for the assurance of salvation for man on earth. Panger Imchen writes:

It is therefore true that when the gospel of Christ was brought to the Aos with

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.172.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,pp.50-51.

the simple message, Jesus died for your sin or you have been redeemed from your sin, they found in the new religion an alternative that was theologically satisfying as well as economically less expensive because it was a free gift. The ancient Ao religion was devoid of the notion of forgiveness and redemption by a third person which is the most essential part of the gospel. This is one reason why Christianity had easy access to the old religious system of the Ao Naga.<sup>42</sup>

O. Alem substantiates Imchen's view by suggesting that in the absence of teaching of forgiveness of God, the Ao religion maybe considered legalistic. He argues:

Just as Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the legalistic, ritualistic, and formalistic forms of Hebrew religiosity in Old Testament, the message of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ is the unique message for the Aos which the traditional religion failed to give. The assurance of forgiveness prior to the judgement of Meyutsung is something that the Aos had never heard of. Thus the message of Christ has been trully good news for the Aos.<sup>43</sup>

How far can we justify the Ao Christian scholars' claim that their traditional religious beliefs and concepts served as the foundation for the proclamation of Christianity. Robin Horton in his essay on *Rationality of conversion part -I* says. "Just what is accepted and what rejected will be largely determined by the structure of basic cosmology."<sup>44</sup> In his study about the relationship between African cosmology and the peoples conversion to Christianity or Islam, he suggests that the crucial variables are not the external influence of Islam or Christianity, but the pre existing

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.62.

<sup>43</sup> Alem Ao, *Tsungremology Ao Naga Christian Theology*, p.43.

<sup>44</sup> Robin Horton, , "On the Rationality of Conversion". *AFRICA..Journal of International African Institute*, Vol.45, No.3, 1975, p.220.

thought patterns and values. Horton suggests that the Africans understand Christian cosmological notions in terms of what they already knew of the invisible world. For instance the African people characteristically see Christian ideas of God as referring to their own Supreme being and draw freely on such ideas in the process of elaborating their conception of this being.

G.A.Oddie in his study about Kartabhaja (Vaishnava) converts to Christianity in Bengal agrees with Horton's view that pre existing beliefs and attitudes facilitate conversion process. The Kartabhaja sect is commonly regarded as an offshoot of the Bengal Vaishva movement and their contact with Christianity started in 1930s. Oddie is of the opinion that because the Kartabhaja already shared some basic assumptions, values and beliefs, they were in a better position than most of their Hindu or Muslim neighbours to understand and respond to the christian message and the evangelical claims about God. For instance the notion of God becoming incarnate or of him being present in the life of a person on earth was a part of Vaishava tradition. "This idea, further refined and re-expressed in Kartabhaja theology, provided yet another fundamental link and parallel with Christian teachings about the nature of Jesus."<sup>45</sup>

John S, Mbiti in his study about the African religions and philosophy is of the opinion that traditional religious concepts and ideas of the African religion still form the essential background of many African peoples conversion to either Islam or Christianity He says:

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<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey.A.Oddie, "Old Wine in New Bottle? Kartabhaja(Vaishnava) Converts to Evangelical Christianity in Bengal, 1835-1845" *IESHR*, Vol.32, No.3, 1995, p.336.

Since traditional religion occupy the whole person and the whole of his life, conversion to new religious like Christianity and Islam must embrace his language, thought patterns, social relationships, attitudes and philosophical disposition, if that conversion is to make a lasting impact upon the individual and his community.<sup>46</sup>

In 1881 Rev.E.W, Clark admitted himself that the traditinal Ao religion formed the basic foundation for the proclamation of the gospel. "The old religion of these people furnishes a splendid basis for Christianity. the fundamental ideas are there, distorted it is true, but there is much of the needful terms."<sup>47</sup> In presenting the gospel to the Aos the missionaries made deliberate attempts to link pre existing beliefs with the presentation of the Christian gospel.

The Ao Christian scholars who are committed Christians show that there are indigenous concepts, ideas and beliefs of Ao religion in their essentials with the Christian concepts. These traditional ideas and concepts are modified or coloured by changing situation.

The Ao Christian scholars thus appropriate their past in the light of Christianity. They try to Christianize the Ao religion while making a claim that the Aos accepted Christinity not because it was a superior religion.

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<sup>46</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p .3.

<sup>47</sup> E.W.Calrk letter to Rev.Murdock dated, 10 March. 1881. Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record. Nagaland.



scholars identify some significant meaning embedded in their traditional religion which shows the openness of the Ao society to Christianity. It has also been clearly shown that the ancient Ao religion was short of the act of Christ and it was devoid of the knowledge of truth. But they go on to argue that the Ao religion cannot be categorised as lacking in logic and coherence because it had no written scripture. Literature cannot be taken as the only measure of judging of people, their culture and religion. The Ao Christian scholars present the Ao religion as a well organised and reasonable religious system, as a world of face to face interaction not only with the living, but just as vividly with the totality of nature with God as the Supreme Being.

## CHAPTER-III

### CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT

The coming of Christianity to Ao land was followed by an age of confrontation, conflict and negotiations within Ao society at various levels. A careful observation would reveal that such confrontation and conflict were not only confined to the Aos themselves i.e. between the converts and non Christian Aos, but there was constant debate among the missionaries on how to relate to the Aos so as to bring them into the Christian fold. This chapter seeks to trace the conflicts that prevailed in Ao society, and the different strategies of propaganda employed by the missionaries.

#### **A New Christian Village:**

After a systematic survey of the Naga Hills, Rev. E.W. Clark ventured up to the Ao area to start the Naga Mission. On 23 December, 1872, a church was started at the village of Molungkimong. There was a division among the Aos of the village regarding the new religion. Therefore it is worthwhile to examine the attitude of the non-Christians towards the group of people who embraced the Christian faith. The writings of the missionaries and stories that have been passed over generations give evidence of the persecution of the Christians by the non- Christians in the village to the extent that Aos could no longer live as one community.

The non-Christian Aos' opposition to the new religion maybe attributed to a variety of factors. Missionaries had presented Aos as savages, their religion as primitive. The advance of christianity was seen by the Aos as a threat to their

traditional socio-cultural and political system. In the political sphere, the non-Christian Aos found the Christian teachings opposed to their ideals and practices of warfare i.e., head-hunting and raiding through which they asserted their superior power over other villages. Non-Christians persistently pressed the Christians to take part in head-hunting. Mary Mead Clark gives a vivid description of the efforts by non-Christian Aos to persecute the converts for their refusal to take part in head-hunting:

Hostility to the new religion waxed stronger and stronger. There was a division in the village council, repeated efforts were made by the opponents of Christianity to entangle their village into war with other villages, and thus to overwhelm by a strong war spirit the influence of few Christians whose teachings were so antagonistic to their military ambition. Without the realisation of which there could be for them no social or political standing in the community and for which they would willingly imperil life. To intimidate the missionary, a war party of young men ambushed one whole week for human heads, which they intended to throw down before him as symbolic of what he might expect in case he did not retreat to the plains.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity also weakened the control of village chiefs, leaders of a community organised on war footing, over their young warriors.

In other parts of India too, missionaries faced opposition to their activities. The social and political systems were threatened to some extent whenever conversion took place. Stephen Neil in his book *History of Christianity in India* writes about the Brahman's opposition to Robert Nobili's acquisition of a residence in Mathurai:

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*. Philadelphia, American Baptist Society Publication. p.18.

In Mathurai, that central point of Hindu Orthodoxy, many were disturbed by the fact that a foreigner had managed to acquire a residence in a high caste quarter of the city. When it became known that the same foreigner had obtained access to some at least among the secrets of Brahman's lore, anxiety deepened. With the baptism of his first converts, many must have felt that their whole position as leaders in society and in the intellectual and religious life of Mathurai was threatened. Fierce reactions were sooner or later to be expected.<sup>2</sup>

Refusal to take part in head hunting cannot be taken as the only factor which led to the division of the village. The Christians were forced to support the rites and sacrifices that were considered unchristian. They were also forced to take part in the drinking bouts that accompanied the feasts. The Christians refused to take part in the ceremonies and rites because these were considered heathen. Since all the rites and ceremonies were communal affairs the non-Christians thought that the withdrawal of the Ao converts from these practices would result in their failure to propitiate the spirits that were responsible for destroying crops and causing illness. Rev. E. W. Clark in A. C. Bowers's book *Under Head Hunters Eyes* says: "when those who had not become Christian saw that the new faith was opposed to the old demon worship, they feared that the failure of the new village to do the devils honour might cause them to break forth and destroy them all".<sup>3</sup>

How do we then make sense of the non-Christians attitude towards the new converts. In this context, we need to look into the importance of rites, sacrifice and ceremonies of the non-Christians in their socio-cultural aspects. K.W. Harl in his

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Neil, *History of Christianity in India: The Beginning to AD 1707*, Cambridge, University Press, 1984, p.286.

<sup>3</sup> A.C.Bowers, *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*, Philadelphia Press, 1929. Rev.E.W.Clark quoted, p.200.

article *Sacrifice and Pagan Belief in Fifth and Sixth Century Byzantium* suggests “Christian refusal to participate in such ceremonies and their denial of the efficacy of sacrifice (and thus of belief in the gods) provoked the persecutions”.<sup>4</sup> Harl is of the opinion that the aim was not to execute or persecute the Christians but rather to compel the Christians to participate in the rituals of sacrifice and other collective rites.

The rituals and sacrifices with their own symbols were a dynamic religious experience which bound the members of the community in a common participation with the divine. The rituals and sacrifices enabled the people to maintain cohesion and allegiance as one community. Harl is of the opinion that differences in the way of approaching the supernatural (i.e. Christians versus non-Christians) fostered the hostility between two groups leaving them at opposite ends. The Christians universally denounced the rites and sacrifices of the non-believers as magic and demonology rather than as a true demonstration of religious power. Harl’s argument gives an insight into the nature of conflict in Ao land. Non-Christians were hostile to the converts because they saw Christianity as a threat to the socio-cultural and religious set up of their society. The non participation of the converts in the rites and sacrifices meant that the non-Christians had to bear all the ceremonial and sacrificial expenses. G.A. Oddie in his article *Christian conversion in the Telegu Country, 1860 - 1900 : A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavary, Krishna-Delta* writes of a similar case of conflict between the converts and non-Christians.

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<sup>4</sup> K.W.Harl, “Sacrifice and Pagan Beliefs in Fifth and sixth Century Byzantium”, *Past and Present*, No.128, August, 1990, p.8.

“To say the least, all these changes caused the caste people a certain degree of inconvenience. If Christians refused to pay taxes towards the cost of festivals or the keep of temples who would make up the deficit? If Madigas refused to sacrifice animals or make and beat the drums to propitiate evil spirits, who would perform those functions”.<sup>5</sup>

The non-Christian Aos thus directed their anger and agitation towards the converts when they realised that their socio-cultural and religious life was at stake. But the converts refused to compromise with the non-Christians which led to the forming of a new village called Molungyimsen on 24 Oct, 1876. Mary Mead Clark describes the way in which the Christians decided to form a new community:

So on the appointed day the missionary with fifteen families, bearing on their backs all of their own and the Missionary’s household goods, marched down through the gateway of Dekhai Heimong stock amid the jeers, taunts, scoops and threats of the villagers who shouted, ‘Go now, but you’ll soon come back’, and one man posing astride the gateway of the stockade indicated to them the humility and greater subjection under which they would return.<sup>6</sup>

The new Christian village was founded without the customary ceremonies that involved sacrificial offerings and rites. The New Village was formed with a determination to abandon warfare and be known as a peaceable Christian village. “In establishing a new village it is customary to sacrifice a cow and make quite an ado of

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<sup>5</sup> G.A.Oddie, “Christian Conversion in the Telegu Country, 1800-1900; A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavari-Krishna Delta”, *IESHR*, Vol.12, No.1, 1975, p.74.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *A corner in India*, p.20.

heathen religious ceremonies. Here there has been nothing of the kind”.<sup>7</sup>

The formation of a new Christian village thus was due to the non-compromising attitudes of both the converts and non-Christians. Their confrontation led to the breakdown of the cohesion of the village. Even Rev. E.W Clark, under whose leadership the new village *was* formed admitted his penitence about the division of the village. In March, 1876, he wrote to the Home Board: “Their village government is a government much higher than the civilized nations. To build another village separate from the others for the sake of the gospel creates division. This new religion should not disturbs their village government system had I know it before I would never have built a new (Molungyimsen) village”.<sup>8</sup> In another letter Rev. Clark admitted his mistake in separating the Christians and non-Christian into two village. “To build a new village with the believers separate from non-believers will not be fair to the gospel. What I have done may have been a mistake”.<sup>9</sup>

One mode of reasoning for the separation of the non-Christian Aos and the converts offered by Richard Eaton in his essay *Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas, 1876 -1971* is attributed to the assault on the socio-cultural and religious life of the Aos:

The very emergence of a Christian community caused difficulties which called for a drastic remedy. By insisting that his tiny band of fifteen followers observe

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<sup>7</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark, Sixty third Annual Report of the American Baptist Missionary Union May, 1877.

<sup>8</sup> *Centennial Of Two Churches*, Molungkimong Baptist Church, Molungkimong,1982 Rev.Clark quoted.p.15.

<sup>9</sup> L. Kijung Ao, *Nokinketer Mungchen*. Christian Literature Centre, Gauhati. 1972. E.W.Clark quoted.p.48.

Sunday as a day of rest. Clark directly interfered with the rhythm and routine of Naga village life for nearly all work in Ao villages hunting, sowing, harvesting was done on a communal basis, and any interference with that rhythm naturally undermined a village's economic functioning, not to mention its ritual solidarity.<sup>10</sup>

He adds "hostility mounted, and the village council became divided as to what action to take, since it was faced with what was surely an unprecedented sort of assault on its religious and social life".<sup>11</sup>

Thus the founding of the new Christian village reflected the gradual erosion of traditional village authority and solidarity as well as the socio-cultural and religious unity of the community on which the Ao society rested.

#### **Ao Christians and Non-Christian Aos:**

Spatial separation of christian and non-christian Aos was only one attempt at confronting the conflict between faiths. This affected only a small area. Elsewhere in Ao land, the spread of christianity was accompanied by an everyday experience of conflict in a situation where christian and non-christian co-existed. In this section we move on to probe the various inherent contradictions that made the new converts oppose their old traditional social and religious life.

One of the major areas of conflict between the Christian Aos and non-Christian Aos was the observation of Amung. Traditionally the Aos observed certain

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<sup>10</sup> Richard M. Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among the Nagas, 1876-1871", *IESHR*, 21, 1 (1980) p.8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.8.



days in a year as amung, and on such days villagers were to abstain from entering or going out of the village. They were also to avoid engaging in any kind of work. The Aos believed that in case there was any break in the observation of Amung, it would result in bad luck for the people as well as for the crops. Rev. Longwell an American Baptist missionary who served among the Aos observed in 1910:

The Amung is a day of enforced rest. It may and frequently does, include the sacrifice, but not always. No one is permitted to go to his cultivation on any day of Amung. The minimum number of Amungs that may occur in any given year is 21 and there is no upper limit. The average is probably about equal in number yearly to the Christian Sabbaths. The result of all this is that the Christians are taxed in kind for the heathen sacrifices and taxed in time for heathen Sabbaths.<sup>12</sup>

Just as the non-Christian Aos observed strict Amungs, the Ao Christian converts had to accept the Christian teaching that enjoins strict observance of the Sabbath:

On such a day, if he be a Christian, he does not work at all. If it happens that on a Sunday a herd of wild pig is located in a favourable position, and a chance, which may not occur again, is seen of surrounding and wiping out pests and so of saving the growing rice, the Christians invariably remain at home and refuse to co-operate on that day with non-Christians in an enterprise planned for the common cause of the village.<sup>13</sup>

Whenever the Christians refused to co-operate with the non-Christians in the observance of Amung, they were punished. They had to either pay fine or render free

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<sup>12</sup> Rev. R.B. Longwell, Impur Assam Baptist Missionary Conference of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Gauhati, January, 8-17, 1910, p.87.

<sup>13</sup> J. P. Mills, The Ao Nagas, Oxford University Press Bombay, (1926: 1973) .p.417.

labour for community work in the village. On some occasions, Christians forced the non-Christians to observe Christian Sabbath i.e. Sunday. "In one village, where the Christians were in great majority and had the whip hand, they fined some non-Christians on one occasion for going down on a Sunday to look at the traps".<sup>14</sup>

Often, cases relating to Amung were decided at the local court at Mokokchung. However it should be noted that the tension regarding amung differed from village to village. Some of the cases that were dealt by the local court at Mokokchung is recorded by Tajen Ao in his book *Christianity versus Ao Nagas*. Examples of such cases are given below:

Case No. 80, Heathen Versus Christians, 22-08-1919, Aliba village

Subject: The defendants have broken our Lichaba Mong by pounding drum. Until now they have only four amungs, now they must keep them all.

Order: After a little discussion the complainants relinquished their claim to a certain extent. The following compromise is agreed upon by both parties. The Christians will pay a pig (value Rs.10/-) to the barracks for breaking the Lijaba Mong and in future keep the following Amungs only:- Moatsu-1 day, Tsungremong-1 day, Takung Kulem-1 day, Lichaba-1 day.<sup>15</sup>

Case No.112, Barricks Versus Yimtichongshi and Chiptakyangba. 31-10-1919. Kinunger Village.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.417.

<sup>15</sup> Tajen Ao, *Christianity Versus Ao Naga*. Tribal Gospel Mission Publishers, Mokokchung Nagaland. 1984. pp.101-102.

The defendants are Christians. They brought bear meat into the village, knowing that Aliba, Chungitia and we have to keep Amung. They then refused either to pay the fine of Rs.10/- while we claim or keep the Amung.

Order: The defendants say that one Takaba of Mangmetong killed a bear on Kinunger land and asked them to help him to carry it towards Mangmetong. At first they refused to do so, saying that if they touched it, Kinunger, Aliba and Chuntia would have to keep Amung and they would be fined. Takaba said that he would take the responsibility, so they took some meat to eat and brought it back to the village. They say that they hoped nothing more would be said at the village. They had subscribed and brought a chicken for purification of genna on the path. The barricks do not object much to the Christians helping Takaba with the bear, but they do object to the meat being brought into the village. The conduct of the defendants is inexcusable. They simply put their own stomach before the feelings of hundreds of other people. They must pay a fine of Rs.10/- to the barricks.<sup>16</sup>

Conflict arising out of the question of observing Sabbaths was quite common in other parts of India where conversion to Christianity took place. For instance, when the converted Malas and Madigas of the Telegu country in the nineteenth century, gave up work on a Sunday, they enraged the local landlord. "The giving up of work on a Sunday, especially during the busy harvest period, was greatly resented by Hindu landlords, as they were compelled to rearrange the fieldwork, so as to meet the new demands of their employees."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Oddie. : "Christian Conversion In the Telegu Country, 1860-1900 :A Case Study of one Protestant Movement in the Godavari -Khrisna Delta". *IESHR VOL-12, No.1, 1975 p.74.*

Conversion disturbed the working of the village economy, both in the case of Aos and of Malas and Madigas. In the case of the Malas and Madigas, the conflict over the question of Sabbath was between two sections of society. The Brahman representing the higher classes who taxed the Malas and Madigas both in terms of their labour and time for their Sabbaths. On the other hand the Christians refused to observe the Amung of the non-Christians which again inconvenienced the whole community. The non-Christian Aos resented Sabbath Sundays because whenever there was work to be done by the whole community on a Sunday the Christians refused to render their labour. In the case of the Aos it was not a matter of people belonging to higher section of society imposing their authority on the lower sections; the conflict was over observance of community practices.

After the coming of Christianity, conflicts were followed by complex transformative processes. Missionaries, christian converts pressurised the local court to allow non-observance of non-Christian Amungs. Gradually, after the whole Ao tribe was Christianised, these Amungs were celebrated by the Ao Christians in a Christian manner, e.g. during the amungs related to Maotsu Mong and Tsungremong prayers were offered to the God Almighty by the whole village followed by a community feast without any sacrificial offering. The non-Christian past was both repressed and appropriated by Christianity.

The functioning of the Ao village government was affected when Christianity made inroads into the Ao society, Tajen Ao in his book *Christianity Versus Ao Nagas* gives a description of the functioning of the Ao village government: "The

social organisation of an Ao village is of a modest democracy formed by clan representations called Samen / Tatar. They rule the village for a number of years and on their retirement another set of representative are chosen to run the government".<sup>18</sup> The expenses of the village government and payment for the service of the Tatar were collected from the village inhabitants.

Most of the time, the leaders in the village government were the ancient traditional believers following traditional norms and customs. The Christian converts could no longer follow the lead given by these leaders. When the new barricks were to be installed, pig sacrifice called Sungu Chumsuk and cow sacrifice called Nashipongchilepok were to be made. The outgoing barricks had to give a pig as return present to the new barricks. The Christian Aos refused to subscribe to these practices and they also declined to take their share of the meat of the animal that was sacrificed for the initiation ceremony of the barricks. When the Christians withdrew from the barricks their claims to the privileges of the barricks were taken away and they had to render village labour as ordinary villagers.

An extract from the tour diary of J.P.Mills gives an idea of how the Christians and the non-Christians confronted each other in the functioning of the village government in Longjang village:

The Christians and non-Christians of Longjang have been rather at loggerheads lately. Two of the Christian barricks have refused to work as barricks anymore. I have passed the following orders. The Christian barricks must resume their

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<sup>18</sup> Tajen Ao. Christianity Versus Ao Nagas. p.120.

duties and take their share of miscellaneous work. They need not administer oath according to Ao custom. Their turn will be taken on this duty by non-Christian barricks. The Christian barricks will accordingly get no share of meat to which barricks are entitled for administering oaths. In case where one party is a Christian and the other not, oath will not be administered. No extra gaonbura will be appointed for Christians but when a post of gaonbura falls vacant their claims will be considered, though no promise is given that a Christian gaonbura will be appointed even then.<sup>19</sup>

There were negotiations and compromises whenever there was conflict and tension between the Christians and non-Christians in the functioning of the village government. However, when there was no scope for compromise between the ancients and the Christians, the village had to split.

The socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Ao society are very closely connected. All the religious sacrifices and ceremonies are performed by the whole community. As Christianity made progress among the Aos, misunderstandings and quarrels developed around old ritual and ceremonies. Rev. Longwell gives a report of the confrontation between the Christians and the non-Christians with regard to religious practices:

The effect of this upon the villagers is inevitable. The unbelieving headman will seek occasion to fine the Christians, partly because they want the feast at the Christians expense, and partly because they can't quite resist the temptation to lord it over their fellow villagers. Unbaptized believers on the other hand will hesitate a long time before declaring it in open symbolic way

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. pp.121-22.

their affiliation with the persecuted sect.<sup>20</sup>

The Christian Aos refused to contribute towards the traditional rites and sacrifices because they felt that such a contribution would make them indirect participants in heathen rites. By forcing the christian to take part in the rites the non-believers wanted to exhibit their power to deter others from becoming christians. Conflicts and tensions were felt even within the family unit. It was quite difficult for a Christian spouse with an unconverted wife or husband to prevent sacrifices in times of sickness. The converted spouse was often accused of giving priority to the new religion over to that of to the family:

The man was a professing Christian, conscientious and faithful, yet in his ignorance of mind was seeking wisdom. His wife, very ill was growing worse; and his relatives, rushing into the house, demanded a sacrifice for the demons. 'I do not believe in it', the men was saying, 'but what can I do ?' After conference and prayer the man left the house saying , 'well, I'll not sacrifice, I'll not sacrifice, and I'll go back and tell the family so'.<sup>21</sup>

Thus there were two types of tensions and conflicts in Ao society between the Christians and the non-Christians. The Christians, in conformity with their doctrine of monotheism rejected their traditional religious practices. The non-christian hostility to christianity followed from their fear that their traditional socio-cultural and religious system was under threat. Without conformity to traditional beliefs the system would collapse.

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<sup>20</sup> Rev. R.B.Longwell. Assam Baptist Missionary Conference of the American Baptist Missionary Union Report, Gauhati. Jan.8-17.1910 p.87.

<sup>21</sup> Clark. A corner in India. p.72.

Another level of conflict develop around Ao cultural institutions. The Morung (arichu) which is also called the bachelors dormitory served as a guard house and club house and played an important role in the social life of the Aos. Before the advent of Christianity, the young unmarried men in the arichu were divided according to their age group. The Christian missionaries decried the Morung as a heathen institution, because sacrifices were made in the Morung and wars strategies were planned in the arichu.

The Christians showed their detachment from the Morung in several ways. They felt that gennas and heathen rites were an integral part of their very process of building Morungs. The Morung is rebuilt every sixth years: when all the materials for a new Morung are ready the old one is broken down. J.P.Mills in his Monograph *The Ao Nagas* gives a description of the procedure of the rebuilding of Morung :

Next day the old men of all the clans using the 'Morung' in question kill the animals, each one saying as he does so 'may my sons in this 'Morung' flourish, and grow like cane shoots and like the shoots of ficus tree, and may they be wise in all things'. For this the old men receive a share of meat and are 'genna' for six days. The oldest of them, after the animals have been killed, digs a hole for the left hand front post. Two men from each clan then go off to the main centre post which is lying ready felled in the jungle, and set to work to carve it. It is set up next day, and on the craving on it and on any other cravings which require freshening up one of the senior inmates puts a mixture of soot and blood from the slaughtered animals.<sup>22</sup>

The Christians objected to all these sacrifices and slaughter of animals that

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<sup>22</sup> Mills. *The Ao Nagas*.p.75.



were connected with the building of Morung. They also stopped rendering community service for the building of Morung and drum houses. Instead of contributing towards the stocking of wood to be used in the arichu, the Christians stocked their wood and torches in the church premises. We are told:

Attempts are often made to avoid little acts of social service on the most trivial excuses; for instance, there is an old custom by which in every 'Morung' there are kept torches which can be taken of gratis by benighted travellers, I have more than once known Christian boys refuse to help in collecting the materials on the plea that the Morung was a heathen institution.<sup>23</sup>

When christians stayed away from the Morung the institution tended to break down and disintegrate.

In a sense conflict was part of the history of conversion all over India. Conversion inevitably distances the new faith from the old- even when they continued to interact. We need to understand what happens during conversion.

"Conversion in the more technical psychological sense means the re-orientation of the soul of the individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right".<sup>24</sup>

Thus A.D. Knock looks at conversion as a total transformation of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.419.

<sup>24</sup> G.A. Oddie. (edited) *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern times*. Manohar Publication New Delhi, 1977. A.D. Nock quoted. p.4.

converts self and soul. R.E.Frykenberg write: "Conversion normally involves or is claimed as the experience of one single individual person or perhaps one small group persons. Conversion normally involves changes in beliefs, group identifications, and characteristics of personality. Conversion normally leads to complete reorganisation and reorientation in a person's emotional condition and intellectual out look".<sup>25</sup> He adds, "conversion, while in the economic, social, political and philosophical views of an individual, has generally and traditionally and most often been applied as a term to describe changed 'religious' belief or 'ideological' position".<sup>26</sup>

Since conversion means rejection of old beliefs, it leads to conflict and confrontation in several ways. Whenever conversion take place, often there is disturbance in the functioning of the economy of a society. Conflicts arise as a result of the upper section of the society loosening their grip over the lower section of the society:

Group conversions introduced new and severe tensions into the village community and often aroused strong reactions from the dominant castes. As converts sometime refused to continue in occupations they considered degrading, so they disassociated themselves, sometimes gradually, sometime abruptly form performing their traditional role in village festivals.<sup>27</sup>

G.A Oddie illustrates the conflict and inconvenience that was caused when the Malas and Madigas of the Telegu country were converted into Christianity. When

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<sup>25</sup> R.E.Frykenberg. "On the Study of Conversion Movement : A Review Article and Theoretical Note". *IESHR* Vol.XVII No.1. 1980, p.129.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*,p.129.

<sup>27</sup> Duncan Forrester. "The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity. 1860 B1960". in G.A. Oddie edited *Religion in South Asia*. New Delhi, p.46.

the Malas and Madigas who were converted to Christianity refused to carry on their traditional task, it provoked active opposition :

In some cases people simply ceased to offer various types of remuneration and services, since the Christian themselves had ceased to carry out at least some of their traditional obligations. In Raghapuram the dhobi refused to wash the Christians cloths and the Komati refused to sell them corn and oil. In villages further north Christians were denied their traditional rights of gathering fire wood on government wasteland and of digging for fresh water in the bed of tanks during drought.<sup>28</sup>

When conversion took place among the Nadars of Tamilnad, their aspiration for upward mobility was met with opposition and soon gave rise to the 'breast cloth controversy'. In Travancore the breast was bared as a symbol of respect to those of higher status. The Nairs, bared their breast before the Nambudiri Brahmins, and the Brahmins did so only before the deity, the Nadars, like all other lower castes, were categorically forbidden to cover their breast at any time.

The dress code prescribed for the Nadars consisted of a single cloth of coarse texture to be worn by females and males alike, no lower than the knee or no higher than the waist. The missionaries objected to this dress code on the ground that it was incompatible with the modesty and decorum of Christian women. In 1814, the government of Travancore issued a circular order permitting the female converts of the lower classes to cover their bodies with a short bodice or just as worn by the women of the Syrian Christian and Muslim Mopla communities. But this

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<sup>28</sup> Oddie, "Christian Conversion in the Telegu Country, 1860-1900", *IESHR*. Vol.12 No.1.1975, p.75.

proclamation did not meet the social aspirations of the Christian Nadar women. “The Nadars of Tinnevely wore the breast cloth, freely, and the women of Travancore would have nothing less. Thus, in addition to the prescribed jacket, or often in lieu of it, the Nadar women increasingly adopted the use of the upper cloth which was worn by the women of higher classes”.<sup>29</sup> By October 1828, the feelings against the Nadars were rapidly rising and the Nairs in Southern Travancore began terrorising the Christian converts. Such behaviour changes, according to Duncan Forester, “were often met with straight repulsion from the higher castes, who quite correctly understood that their traditional position was being threatened, and the solidarity of the village as a sacred community destroyed”.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, we find that conversion is always accompanied by a certain degree of conflict and tension in any society. But they are different types of conflicts.

If we carefully analyse the conflicts and tensions within the Ao society, we can see that they were not confined to different section of people whether higher or lower because there was no caste system. There was tension between the Christians and non-Christians. In this sense conflict was horizontal rather than vertical; it was confined to differences in beliefs. Conversion in Ao society led to a break down of village cohesion, and of Ao customs and traditions. This was followed by erosion of clan loyalties and lessening of communal responsibility.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid,p.60.

<sup>30</sup> Forrester, “The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity”. in *G.A.Oddie*, ed. *Religion in South Asia*, 1977, p.46.

### **Conflict Amongst the Missionaries:**

In this section, we shall try to look into the conflicts and tensions among the missionaries themselves. I discuss the various debates among the missionaries and their strategies to bring the Aos in the Christian fold.

The American Baptist missionaries who served among the Aos had different attitudes towards the Ao society and the changes that were to be brought. The pioneer missionary Rev. Clark believed in the gradual upliftment of the spiritual as well as the material standard of the Aos. But other missionaries like Haggard and Perrine who came later into the field wanted radical transformation of the Ao society in accordance with Christian teaching.

The missionaries were not content with the Aos being baptised, or with their renunciation of their ancestral worship patterns. In practice the missionaries demanded much more. Candidates for baptism were required to pass tough examinations on the Christian doctrines and also had to furnish evidence that they had not participated in any heathen rituals nor drunk any beer for three months.

The question of temperance and total abstinence from rice beer was a major focus of debate amongst the missionaries. On the one hand, rice beer was a drink that the Aos relished, while on the other hand, total abstinence from it became popularly accepted as the outstanding mark of a good Christian. In 1900, Rev.E.W.Clark wrote to the Home Board, regarding the question of temperance and total abstinence:

Very seldom is a man intoxicated, as I am told and I have asked many a one

who has lived there. So there is not the necessity of making total abstinence a requisite of church membership. Here it seems to be a necessity and only as a necessity can it be justified, as I think. The Aos considered rice beer as a part of their fold. Their food include rice beer as well as cooked rice. The missionaries are accused of meddling with their food of our converts, the great question ninety nine out of hundred is that of giving up of rice beer, not a question of choice between the old faith and the new.<sup>31</sup>

The question of temperance or total abstinence was usually debated whenever the missionaries had their annual conference. Some missionaries were of the opinion that the spiritual aspect of the new converts is more important than to meddle with their tradition, custom and food habit. Mason stated at the American Baptist Missionary Conference in 1886: "In all discipline there is danger in laying down specific rules. In our mission there is a tendency to magnify the merit and demerit of specific acts. My opinion is that we should make no standard as to discipline, other than the scriptural ones".<sup>32</sup> At the same conference Rev.E.W.Clark, who had lived with the Aos for several years, expressed his consideration towards the Ao habit of drinking rice beer and he implied that total abstinence was difficult. "It is a matter of food with the Nagas in reference to Maud. The law of preservation compels them to ferment the bad rice. The Bible only demands temperance, not total abstinence. We can discipline, but must have scriptural authority, and not do it on the say of the missionary."<sup>33</sup> But after several debates Clark himself admitted, "one difficulty is, the

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<sup>31</sup> Rev. E.W.Clark to Dr. Barbour dated 15. March 1900. Molungyimsen Baptist Church Nagaland. record.

<sup>32</sup> Mr. Mason, The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union Conference. Nowgong December.18-21,1886, p.233.

<sup>33</sup> Rev. E.W.Clark The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union Conference. Nowgong, December 18-21,1886, p.233.

Nagas do not get drunk easily. When does the drunkenness begin? It is difficult to say what is to be called drunkenness? Total abstinence is best”.<sup>34</sup>

Against the intoxicants, the missionaries quoted the Bible. We may refer to the references given in the Bible regarding intoxicants: “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go in the Tent of meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come”.<sup>35</sup> Or again: “Wine is a mocker, and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray is not wise”.<sup>36</sup> And: “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from the birth”.<sup>37</sup>

Another reason why the missionaries insisted on total abstinence may be attributed to the Christian concept of body as a temple of God which should not be defiled “Don’t you know that you yourself are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you. If any one destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for the God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple”.<sup>38</sup> The missionaries argued that the fermented rice beer is intoxicating which leads to defiling of the body which is considered as sin in the Christian concept.

Abstinence from intoxicants has always been emphasized by the missionaries in other parts of India too. Groups which practised abstinence were inevitably praised. In the eye of the missionaries, abstinence was surely a saving feature of the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.230.

<sup>35</sup> Leviticus 10:9, *Holy Bible*, NIV, Nashville.

<sup>36</sup> Proverbs 20:1, *Holy Bible*, NIV, Nashville.

<sup>37</sup> Luke, 1:15. *Holy Bible*, NIV, Nashville.

<sup>38</sup> I. Corinthian. 3:16-17. *Holy Bible*, NIV, Nashville.

Shannar caste of Tamilnad. "It is worthy to remark, that the Shannar who extract the Palmyra juice, which when allowed to ferment is the ordinary intoxicating drink of the Hindu drunkard avoid the use of it in its fermented state as carefully as the most punctilious Brahmin".<sup>39</sup>

Abstinence and teetotalism are seen as important criteria for being a Christian in both the cases of Shannars of Tamilnad and the Aos. For the Shannars abstinence was a saving grace inspite of all the missionary's negative perception of these people. Whereas for the Aos the major debate concentrated on the question whether the people could drink rice beer. In Ao land there was a tussle between the missionary policy and the customs and traditions of the Aos. The missionaries realised that not all the Aos were submissive to their demands. In a letter Rev. E.W.Clark wrote to the Home Board in 1896:

In arraying the public spirited men of the village against the new missionaries, who were irritated because the leading men were not meekly submissive, and yet continue to occupy a prominent seat in the chapel, by which the consent of the people were reserved for them, because of old it has been the custom among the Aos to respect old men especially those in authority.<sup>40</sup>

The new missionaries like Haggard and Perrine who came into the field by 1892 pursued the task of making teetotalism possible and they did it with great force and insistence:

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<sup>39</sup> Hardgrave, *The Nadars Of Tamilnad, The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, 1969, pp.39-40.

<sup>40</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark. to Duncan dated 29 Sept, 1896. Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record.



But a few Sabbaths previous to disbandment, I was present when the question of temperance was discussed. No Naga present approved publicly of making total abstinence a basis of church membership. The leaders advised disciplinary sharp for any show of drunkenness. One of the most influential and outspoken men quietly remarked that wine was apparently used in New Testament times and total abstinence from the use did not seem to be taught of by Christ or made a condition for discipleship.<sup>41</sup>

While some missionaries favoured aggressive proselytization, others favoured caution. Rev.E.W.Clark was not pleased with the assertive strategy: "To take my advice in such matters, and that they were disposed to be more dictatorial in dealing with Nagas than I thought otherwise .... I did not object to the reform but the way in which it was done".<sup>42</sup> He went on to argue that missionaries like Haggard and Perrine wanted to take radical steps to refine the people in accordance to christian teachings without even understanding <sup>→ their</sup> culture:

Haggard is discerning and his judgements when based on knowledge are frequently good. But his imagination appears to be occasionally wayward, and to furnish him with what he appears to regard as facts. I am told that when he was coming to Assam and met a conference of some of our missionaries at Gauhati, he laid down the method of mission work in the Naga Hills though he had never seen the people or the country. Some with more imagination effected to this plan but he insisted he was right. But on his arrival at Sibsagar he had to confess his mistake... He seems to have a very strong conviction that his judgements are right and that what is right should prevail. Also has a low estimate of the judgement of others and a dispositions laid by others.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Rev.E.W.Clark to Dr. Duncan dated. 18 March, 1896, Molungyimsen Baptist Church Record.

One of the issues debated was related to the matter of reforming church members to transform them into proper christian fold. All the missionaries agreed that certain practices such as maud drinking, opium eating etc. continued even after conversion. But difference of opinion arose between the missionaries over the way in which the members could be reformed. Clark emphasised on cautious and gradual transformation. Haggard argued for severe steps and total conformity to christian practices by the church members: "In the midst of these busy scenes came the special 'care of the Churches', in connection with certain important changes in the spiritual work of the Mission. Rev. Clark had long felt that there were some things which he would like to have different, some customs which he like to have eradicated from the Church but he had not thought it wise to undertake the task until he was re-enforced".<sup>44</sup> Haggard also mentioned about the new covenant which included the question of idolatry, liquor drinking, opium eating, Sabbath observance, marriage relation, and giving to the Lord's work. This new covenant according to Haggard was formulated to serve both as a standard for individual churches, and also to define the position of the mission: "As anticipated, it did not meet the approval of the members, but the time had come to rid the Mission of certain grave evils... and a determined standard was necessary. It was a hard thing to do, and caused as much anxiety and sorrow, but as to the wisdom and necessity of the step I have no question".<sup>45</sup>

S.A. Perrine in the Missionary Conference in December, 1895 reported that Clark himself had admitted that some evils were ailing the Church but had not

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<sup>44</sup> Mr. Haggard. The Baptist Missionary Magazine Vol.LXXV, July 1895 No.7. p.306.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

succeeded in overcoming them. Perrine also wrote that difference of opinions emerged between Clark and Haggard and himself regarding the disbandment and reformation of the church:

Together we attempted reform but like all reformers found it slow work. When Haggard came and we again talked over the situation and planned for reform a new. We were practically a unit on the need to reform but again like all reformers found it difficult to unite on lines of actions and methods of work. In as much as Mr. Haggard and I seemed to be more nearly united on methods, it was finally thought best, that Mr. Clark turns such matters over to us. Mr. Haggard and I then decided on that what will be pleased to call radical measure. In a council of the Molung Church we advised the Church to disband and reorganise. They acted on our suggestion, and the new Church adopted a covenant which takes a strong stand against most of the evils found in this field.<sup>46</sup>

In the foregoing account we have sought to identify some of the major areas of confrontation, conflict and tension that existed within the Ao society as well as between the pioneer missionary E.W Clark and the other missionaries who joined and served in the Naga Mission. The inference that can be drawn is that in the midst of all these confrontations and tensions, the Christian message appeared both puzzling and disconcerting for the Aos at certain points. For instance the Missionary emphasis on sobriety and their denunciation of rice beer, a drink the Aos relished so much seemed ~~weird~~ to the people.

A careful observation would reveal that it is not primarily the message but the

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<sup>46</sup> Rev. S.A. Perrine, 'Report from the Ao Naga Field'. The Assam American Baptist Missionary Union, Sibsagar, December.14-22. 1895. p.43.

messenger of the gospel who turns out to be the greatest problem for the average Christians as well as the non-Christians. The missionaries remained foreign not only in the outward appearance, but also in their inward emotional responses. The well intentioned but insensitive destruction of some of the cultural features of the AOs has undermined the very society which the missionaries sought to aid. The traditional practices and customs they abolished needed to be examined, but the form of enquiry into them was problematic.

## CHAPTER-IV

### EDUCATING THE AO NAGAS

While mapping out the strategy for Naga Mission, Rev. E.W. Clark clearly saw education as a possible agency through which Christianity could be communicated to the people. Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation, activities related to education and schooling first attracted the attention of the Ao Nagas when they frequented the plains of Assam. Rev.Clark reported:

During the next few months the number of parties to see the school increased. Time after time they called on me and insisted that I go with them to the Hills. I saw that they were anxious for something better for their children than they themselves knew, and they believed that they saw the ideal in the work which was being done for the children on the plains.<sup>1</sup>

This Chapter looks at the educational work carried out by the Christian missionary for the Ao Nagas.

#### **Arichu, Traditional Institution of Learning:**

Before we embark on to discuss the educational programme of the American Baptist Missionaries in the Ao area, it is pertinent to have an idea of the traditional Ao system of learning. Institutionalised system of education was

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<sup>1</sup> A.C. Bowers. *Under Head-Hunters Eyes*. Philadelphia, Judson Press. 1929. E.W. Clark quoted p.198.

unknown to the Nagas before the advent of Christianity. Yet in every Naga society, the Morung or the bachelors' dormitory was considered to be an institution where young unmarried men were trained in social and cultural affairs. The Aos called it 'arichu' the literal meaning of which is 'platform of warriors'.

Different views have been expressed by anthropologists and scholars about arichu and its functions and significance have been differently analysed. According to Christopher Von Furer Haimendorf, "The bachelors hall is an institution much like the English public school; one may agree or disagree with the principle of giving boys a training in community spirit outside the individual family, but there can be no question that the Morung is one of the main pillars of the Ao social order".<sup>2</sup>

J.P. Mills in his monograph *The Ao Nagas* expresses a similar view about Morung. "A Morung is a microcosm of the village and has its own council, reminding one strongly again of the public school with its prefects".<sup>3</sup> The Morung's function was divided according to age group, but basically it was a guard house against possible enemy attacks, a dormitory for unmarried men, a meeting place, a centre of education in arts and discipline and it played an important ceremonial role in the Ao society. "Here (in the Morung) the youth receive invaluable lessons in leadership, they also get acquainted with history, culture, folklore, songs and dance of their village."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C.V. Furr Haimendorf. *The Naked Nagas*, Thacker Spink & Co, Calcutta, 1968. p.52.

<sup>3</sup> J.P. Mills *The Ao Nagas*, Oxford University Press, (1926; 1973), p.73.

<sup>4</sup> M. Horam, *Naga Polity*. Low price Publications, Delhi, 1992. p.67.

Grata Somare describe the Morung as a place where tradition and cultural dynamics are safely preserved. “In both independent as well as community life in the Morung the young men could move freely between the two poles of the customs and habits on the one hand and that of their personal experience on the other, thus becoming both new guardians of tradition and active participants in the cultural dynamics”.<sup>5</sup>

All the anthropologists and writers accept that the Morung or arichu was not an institution where formal education was imparted. It was mainly a place for social training for young men which served the purpose of Ao society in more than one way. The traditional Ao system of learning or education was not in term of reading and writing. The arichu helped the transfer of the collective knowledge of one generation to the next. This is the function traditional education plays. As Bourdieu writes: “In traditionally defining the system of education as the sum total of the institutional or customary mechanisms ensuring transmission from one generation to another of the culture inherited from the past (i.e. The accumulated information)”.<sup>6</sup>

Education was seen as crucial to missionary activity:

“ The Baptist Missionary Union in their original constitution recognised education as one of the means to be adopted for the introduction of Christianity in

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<sup>5</sup> Grata Somare and Leonardo Vigorerelli (eds). *The Naga*, Galleria Lorenzelli Bergamo Italy, 1992, p.24.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. SAGE Publications. London, 1977, p.10.

India. It was considered that one of the greatest instruments of success of Christianity will be the diffusion of Christian knowledge and soon missionary schools became as Dufferin wrote in 1830, highways to the general success of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of opening school along with the building of Churches is stressed in all the writings of the missionaries. Rev. P.H. Moore in his report 'The need of a native ministry and how to supply it' at the American Baptist Missionary Union Conference in 1886 said, "The Church will need education with reference to it. They should be taught to look upon it as their institution".<sup>8</sup> The Baptist Christian Missionaries clearly saw that in order to make their work permanent, education had to be taken care of. S.A. Perrine's report at the Missionary Conference in 1905 stated: I think all who work in the hills will agree with me when I say that hill men in mode of Missions can compare with education. Through schools and gospel is made to reach the mountaineers more rapidly and permanently than by any other means. We have therefore made school work a speciality.<sup>9</sup>

The need for schools as an agency which would work with the Church is again voiced out by W.F. Dowd at the Missionary Conference in 1916. "The school work is fundamental. If the Churches are to be intelligent, self reliant and

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<sup>7</sup> Ferdaus, A. Quarishi, *Christianity in North Eastern Hills of Asia. Social impact and Political implications*, University Press, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 1987. p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Papers and Discussions of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Nowgong, Dec. 18-21, 1886, p.163.

<sup>9</sup> Minute of the Eight Session of the Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U., Guwahati. December. 24, to January 1, 1905. p.57.



aggressive no effort must be spared to make the Christian school as efficient as possible".<sup>10</sup> Schools were established by the Christian missionaries for the Ao Nagas so that teachers could also serve as preachers and evangelist which in turn would hasten the process of evangelisation. E.F.Merriam is of the opinion that the American Baptist Missionary did not see schools primarily as an evangelising agency but, "they have ever been ready and jealous in establishing and conducting schools for the broadening and deepening of the religious interest and training of Christian workers who could be prepared to labour intelligently and usefully among their own people".<sup>11</sup>

Intellectual enlightenment was seen as the pre-requisite for conversion of the Naga. "If knowledge is man's supreme need and the chief pre-requisite to conversion, then surely, those who know the most are nearest the kingdom, and are fittest subjects for preaching and exhortation, and the first step of evangelisation must be the increase of knowledge".<sup>12</sup> Some recognised the importance of secular instruction, other condemned it. "The missionary believe that something more than what commonly goes for knowledge is needed to bring about acceptance, and that the almost total lack of such knowledge is not incompatible with conversion, yet in most missionary circle, the usefulness of

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<sup>10</sup> Reports of the Missionary, Assam Baptist Missionary Union of the American Baptist Mission Society, Nowgong, Feb.17-24, 1916, p.20.

<sup>11</sup> E.F. Merriam. *A history of American Baptist Missions*. Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1913, p.224.

<sup>12</sup> Papers and discussions of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union Conference, Nowgong, December. 18-29. 1889, p.179.

school which give a good degree of secular instruction passes with hardly a challenge”.<sup>13</sup>

The missionary argument that knowledge is a pre-requisite of a person’s conversion leans towards the proposition that the introduction of education to the Aos represented an embattled response to the pressure and need of appealing to the mind of the people through knowledge and word.

### **Vernacular in Missionary’s Strategy:**

“Far from being an annoying nuisance, the native languages were regarded by missionaries as absolutely crucial to determination of truth”.<sup>14</sup> The missionaries believed that to present the gospel to the Ao Nagas, the immediate step required is to reduce the Ao tongue to writing, since they did not have a script of their own. At the third Triennial Conference of the American Baptist Missionary Conference at Tura in 1893, it was resolved to introduce the Roman alphabets in writing the language of the Ao tribe. “Missionaries played a vital role in setting up of printing presses, undertaking the publication of school books, translating the Bible into the various Indian languages, standardising the indigenous languages, and encoding the literature in script form”.<sup>15</sup> Thus the missionaries pursued the knowledge of the indigenous language in order to relate to the people and present the gospel in a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>14</sup> Gauri Viswanathan. *Masks of conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. Faber and Faber, London, 1989, pp.104-105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.105.

more concrete way not only in the case of the Aos but with all the people they sought to evangelise.

The importance and need for the mastery of the vernacular as a part of the American Baptist Missionary Union strategy is stated clearly by Rev. M.H. Bixby in the Baptist Missionary Magazine of July, 1898 issue:

It is important that the society emphasize the necessity of its missionaries acquiring a fluent command of the vernaculars. The vital relation of such command with the missionary success is too obvious to require argument. It remains true, however, that many on the field have failed in acquiring a fluent use of the languages in which they are called to address the natives. It is not putting it too strongly to say that this has been a weak point in our work. The responsibility of this condition does not rest alone with our missionaries, but with the method hitherto too commonly pursued in sending new men.<sup>16</sup>

S.A. Perrine's report of the Naga field at the Missionary Conference in 1895 indicates the way in which every detail was looked into in understanding the Ao language:

Much work has been bestowed on the Ao Dictionary. It has been written three times, is now being written again, and thoroughly revised. The cross references are numerous, the many synonym or partial synonyms are noted as the different ideas peculiar to each. The origin of many words is indicated where it can satisfactorily ascertained. These varieties of work in addition to the giving of definitions greatly increase the labour. But it is

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. M.H. Bixby. *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Vol.LXXVIII, No.7, July 1898, p.263.

hoped that the dictionary will be all the more valuable for one who wishes to study the language and really master it.<sup>17</sup>

The Ao Naga Dictionary, written by Rev. Clark was published in 1911 by the Baptist Mission Press Calcutta.

A quick look at the pioneering work by the missionaries in the field of language study for the various Naga tribes show the degree of emphasis given to vernacular in the missionary strategy:

In the beginning the missionaries had to do real pioneering work in the field of language study. Clark reduced (Chongli) Ao to writing; Rivenburg worked on the same and then had to pick up also Angami; Miss Narola, Rivenburg daughter, learned Angami, the Witter started with organising the Lotha language; Perrine besides learning Ao, worked on Sema and Lotha; Tranquist studied Angami and also Rengma, Sema and Lotha; Dowd and Longwell learned Aos; the Dickens started with Sema, hoping to work among the Semas, and the Houstons studied Lotha; while Anderson and Delano tried to master Sema.<sup>18</sup>

In the collection of material, local pundits helped the missionary and for the study of language every missionary had to give a language allowance. The missionary had to give atleast two annual examination and was obliged to report the result to the Home Board.

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<sup>17</sup> Minute. Resolutions and Historical Reports of the Fourth Triennial Conference of the Assam Mission of A.B.M.U. Sibsagar, December, 14-22, 1895, p.42.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions in Nagaland*, Vendrame Misiological Institute Shillong, 1984, pp.140-141.

### **Assessment of Missionary Educational Work:**

Whenever a church was started in the Ao area, a school was established by the early missionaries. These schools were known as Mission Schools. The first formal school in Nagaland was opened by Mrs. Clark in 1878 at Molungyimsen which was a girls school. The second school was started by Rev. Clark in 1880 at Merangkong village with the assistance of Godhula and M.D. Burnath. In the month of July 1885, Rev. Rivenberg entrusted Zilli to open a school at Lirumen village. Till the early thirties there were about seventy six Mission School in the Ao, Lotha and Sema area which were under the leadership of Ao Baptist Association.

A summary of Rev. Clark literary works is given below:

*Ao Naga Premier*, No.1. 1877.

*Naga Catechism*, 1878.

*The Gospel of Matthew*, 1882.

*Naga Catechism*, revised ed. 1883.

*Naga Hymn Book*, compiled ed. 1883.

*The Gospel of John*, 1884.

*Life of Joseph*, 1884.

*Ao Naga Grammar with illustrative phrases and vocabulary*. Shillong, 1893.

*Ao Naga Premier*, No.2, 1893.

*Naga Hymn Book*, revised ed, 1900.

*The Life of Joseph*, revised ed, 1905.

*Ao Naga Dictionary*, 1911.

The foregoing discussion about the educational policy of the missionaries for the Ao Nagas show that all their efforts were geared towards the preaching of the Gospel to the Aos. The idea of Rev. E.W.Clark on school and its relationship to preaching is evident brought in one of his letters in 1874:

As long as there are thousands of heathen who will probably receive the Gospel by preaching, the maintaining of many primary schools at large expenses as a means of evangelisation, cannot be defended. Because, the preaching of the Gospel to those who will receive it, is so much the cheapest and most efficiently made. Where schools can be maintained at small expenses and the missionary or his wife or the native preacher in addition to his preaching work do the school teaching, then all right. So too, if we are likely to loose the control of a prosperous mission unless we launch out for schools, then we must do it or do more than otherwise.<sup>19</sup>

Several letters and writings of the missionaries reveal the thinking that lay behind the attempt of Christian missionaries to educate the Ao Nagas. Structuring the mind through education alone could ensure long term Christianization. Rivenburg wrote to John N. Mordock in 1886: "I believe there is an immense amount of nonsense talk about Christianising heathen savages, atleast without giving them secular schools to make the work permanent. I am the last to want to

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<sup>19</sup> Rev. E.W. Clark's letter to John N. Mordock dated 25 March, 1874, Molungyimsen Church Nagaland Records.

do school work, but someone must teach in schools and make books or our work will be transitory or vain”.<sup>20</sup>

C.D. King who was the pioneer missionary in Kohima area also stressed the importance of education for evangelisation of the Nagas. “Something must be done for the Nagas and I suspect it will cost money and that educational work will constitute an important branch of the missionary who tries to save souls among them.”<sup>21</sup> In another letter he wrote, “I am not putting this school to the forefront, in point of importance. “Preach the gospel” is the first requirement of our commission. Whoever controls the educational work among the Nagas will have it in his power greatly to help him or render all direct evangelical work”.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis given on scripture and other Christian religious texts by the missionaries show how the educational policy for the Nagas was shaped by the project of evangelisation. “In our school the Bible is the text book, with such other books as directly bear on the Bible. Our purpose is to so help anyone tribe that, on going from this school to his own or another people, he can tell the old, old story.”<sup>23</sup>

The papers and discussions of the American Baptist Missionary Union Conference of 1886 at Nowgong, show how intensely the issue of education was

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<sup>20</sup> Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions In Nagaland*, Rivenburg, quoted, p.78.

<sup>21</sup> Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions In Nagaland*, C.D. King, quoted, p.96.

<sup>22</sup> Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions In Nagaland*, C.D. King, quoted, p.98.

<sup>23</sup> M.M. Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1907, p.132.

discussed. Bible and other Christian religious texts were to be the central part of the curriculum of the Mission Schools. It was said:

“The text book should be the word of God. In the study, and in going about from village, he should be with them, instructing their minds in the truth, leading to act it out in their lives”.<sup>24</sup> At the same conference Mr Witter said, “All that anyone has advocated is, that we have men who know the Bible. No one has suggested higher education. We must give them Bible instruction, in order to fulfil our duty in obeying the Great Commission”.<sup>25</sup>

Rev.C.E.Burdette while presenting his paper on ‘The claims and conduct of mission schools’ said: “The one thing needed by the people, the one peculiar thing to be imparted by the school is the knowledge of the word of God. The best course of study for the accomplishment of this purpose should be honestly selected on approved pedagogical principle”.<sup>26</sup>

Christian education alone could help in transforming the moral order of the ‘savages’. Rev. W.E. Dowd at the missionary conference in 1905 stated:

“We feel that no education will ever be successful among these wild people that is not based on the most rigid morality and a strong, living spirituality. Hence with all our efforts to raise the intellectual standard it is ever our chief aim

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<sup>24</sup> Papers and Discussion of the Jubilee Conference of the Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U. Nowgong, December, 18-29, 1886. p.161.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.165.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.177.



to present Jesus Christ as the source of all true knowledge as well as the only fountain of moral and spiritual life".<sup>27</sup>

So despite the sacrifices and spade work to educate the Ao Nagas, the missionaries could not do much to promote higher education due to their obsession with the word of gospel.

### **Role of British Administrators in Educating the Ao Nagas:**

The history of education of the Nagas is incomplete without asking whether education was the monopoly of the missionaries only or whether the British administrators played some role in educating the Nagas. In 1889 the Ao area came under the jurisdiction of British administration.

There are differences of opinion regarding the patronage given by the British administration to the missionaries for educating the Nagas. Some speak eloquently of the liberal contribution made and the keen interest shown by the British administrators. On the other hand, others are critical of the British administrators' role on the ground that their help was mainly motivated by their objective of maintaining security in the frontier.

There are two phases in the educational policy of the colonial rulers in Nagaland. Till 1904, the interest of the British towards educational development for the Nagas was lukewarm. It was mainly limited to pecuniary grants to the

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<sup>27</sup> Minutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U., Gauhati. December 24, 1904, to January, 1905, p.61.

Christian missionaries in the Naga Hills. The administrators considered education to be the best means for reclaiming the rugged Nagas into the fold of order and civilization,<sup>28</sup> and this task was left to the missionaries. In this context N.K. Das in his essay *Tribal formation and social formation in Nagaland*, asserts, “Generally unconcerned with the impact of Christianity on tribal culture the British always hoped that the educational and literary efforts of the missionaries would promote peace and economic prosperity among the tribal”.<sup>29</sup>

The role of the colonial administrators as co-partner of the missionaries in educating the Nagas is evident from the letters and records of the missionaries. Mrs. Mary Mead writes:

New arrangements have been made by which the government educational department takes over the village schools, thus far without seriously affecting the faithfulness of the teachers as Christian leaders. Such government inspection unquestionably stimulates both teachers and pupils to greater thoroughness, while at the same time it places at the disposal of the mission the experience of trained educational leaders and diminishes financial burden by grants-in-aid.<sup>30</sup>

After 1904, the British administrators changed their policy and took up the task of educational development on a larger scale. Their change of attitude is noted by Rev. S.A. Perrine in his report at the Missionary Conference in 1905: “On returning from furlough I found the government greatly interested in

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<sup>28</sup> Foreign Deptt. Pol. A., May, 1840, No..148.

<sup>29</sup> N.K. Das, “Tribal formation in social change in Nagaland”, in B.B. Kumar edited *Modernisation in Naga society*. Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p.38.

<sup>30</sup> Clark. *A Corner in India*, p.165.

education, where as formerly it seemed decidedly lukewarm.”<sup>31</sup> The government desired Naga school books. So Rev. Perrine got pundits to prepare primers and arithmetic in Ao, Lotha, Sema and Mozunger Naga, in addition an English-Lotha vocabulary and the gospel of Mattew in Lotha. The manuscripts of all these were sent to Shillong for printing. The Naga hills officials assured that they would all be approved. Mr. Reid, the Deputy Commissioner wrote strong commendations of the work.

In 1904, twenty five years after the establishment of the first school in 1878 by Mary Mead Clark, the first Government Lower Primary School was established in Molungyimsen village by Mr. William, the then Sub-Divisional Officer at Mokokchung. Government schools increased significantly during the 1930s. In 1938, out of 167 educational institutions, 115 were government lower primary schools, 10 government aided lower primary schools. 36 lower Primary school Missionary aided and 2 upper primary standard mission aided schools. There was also one government industrial school.

Several scholars have discussed this change in the educational policy of the British administrators. According to Mar Atsongchanger. “The system of British education was a utilitarian philosophy of education”.<sup>32</sup> Piketo Sema in his book *British policy and administration in Nagaland 1881-1947*, argues there were three factors which influenced the government’s new policy of education.

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<sup>31</sup> Minutes of the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U. Gauhati. December 24, 1904 to January 1, 1905. p.58.

<sup>32</sup> Mar Atsongchanger. *Christian Education and Social Change*. CLC, Gauhati. 1995. p.95.

According to him, since the missionaries were obsessed with their religious work, education was not given adequate attention. The mission schools were also often understaffed and lacked qualified teachers. The non Christian Nagas were also reluctant to send their children to the missionary sponsored schools because they objected to the teaching of gospel in schools and the missionary attempts to convert the students.

The government educational policy for the Nagas was related to the educational policy of the British throughout India. After 1857 the British followed a cautious policy of dissociating literature from religion. British administrators wanted to avoid all imputations of interference in native religion. The British government was apprehensive of the content of Christian instruction. The educated Indians had few objections to studying the life of Christ, but they were hostile to some particular doctrines of Christianity.

The utilitarian influence in educational policy of the British meant a break in the relationship between the religious and secular motives. Gauri Viswanathan writes:

Rather the return to secularism is less a rejection of an earlier pedagogical approach to stressing the identification of literature with religious value than a secular re-inscription of ideas of truth, knowledge, and law derived from one sphere of knowledge after another; the setting up within each of these spheres, of a secular orientation and autonomous explanatory laws;

and ultimately the confinement of religion to matters of religious faith alone, excluding even morals.<sup>33</sup>

The British adopted a policy of non-interference for reasons of expediency and there was a subtle shift in purpose from an assertion of Christian truths to an endorsement of British laws, institutions and government. This policy, according to Viswanathan, generated an image of the Englishman as benign, disinterested, detached, impartial and judicious who stood as a symbol of intellectual inquiry and religious no-interference. The British depended vitally on the stability of the image and on the consistency with which it was pursued. About the British violation of the policy of the religious neutrality, Viswanathan says, “By breaching the good faith through which the British exercised their authority over the natives, they threatened to unmask the illusions that British rule in India required for its legitimation illusions of trust, honor and obligation”.<sup>34</sup>

The yielding of pedagogy of Christian morality to worldly knowledge freed the British government to pursue an educational policy that actually confirmed, not altered, the patterns of stratification of indigenous society of the people they sought to colonise and minister.

### **Education and Cultural Transformation:**

We now need to consider further the connection between education and cultural transformation in the Ao Naga society.

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<sup>33</sup> Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, p.95.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.108.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, all pedagogic actions whether it is diffused or exerted by educated members of a social formation or group or by the system of agents explicitly mandated for this purpose by an institution, directly or indirectly produce cultural arbitrary of the dominant culture or the dominant group. "All pedagogic action (PA) is, the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power."<sup>35</sup> Pedagogic action legitimises its authority by drawing out the implications of its acceptance by any group of people upon whom it is exerted. Bourdieu writes:

In any given social formation, because the pedagogic work through which the dominant pedagogic is carried on tends to impose recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant culture on the members of the dominated groups or classes, it tends at the same time to impose on them by inculcation or exclusion recognition of the legitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary.<sup>36</sup>

Thus it can be discerned that the power that pedagogic action exercise upon a society is more than the widening of mental horizon of the people. Christianity and modern education legitimised their power when people bowed to the power of words and knowledge. However, it was western education which displayed its legitimacy explicitly:

"Its power rested on the idea that European disciplines, being products of human reason, were independent of systems of beliefs based on pure faith. Therefore, by proving what faith merely proposed, they confirmed for

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<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, p.5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

more than the mere truthfulness of Christian belief; more important, they demonstrated the power and authority of the western mind to penetrate the mysteries of the natural and phenomenal world”.<sup>37</sup>

The authority and power of pedagogic action on the Naga society can be discussed in term of changes that it entailed on the socio-cultural life of the Nagas. The British and the missionaries with their powerful hegemonic version of civilization saw the Naga society as being uncivilized. So what they attempted to do was to reclaim, refine, educate and enlighten the Nagas and incorporate them within the fold of western ideas. The Nagas began to see education as a process of enlightenment. A Naga historian writes:

“With the progressive dissemination of modern education, the outlook of the people which formerly remained narrow significantly developed and along with it, appreciation of modern education also receive further momentum. The development of broader and healthier outlook of the people enable them to accept the new trend of change in their society”.<sup>38</sup>

How do we account for the ways in which the Aos responded to the changes that were exerted on the Ao society through various agencies by missionaries and the colonial rulers. The government wanted to avoid any sudden disruption of the Naga culture and tradition, where as the missionaries embarked upon the policy of total cultural transformation of the Nagas. “Government officials and missionaries took unfortunately exactly opposite views on what was

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<sup>37</sup> Viswanathan, *Mask of conquest: Literary Study and British rule in India*, p.109.

<sup>38</sup> Piketo, Sema, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, 1881-1847*, New Delhi, p.92.

good for the Nagas, and a great deal of confusion was caused in the minds of the tribesmen. If one sahib praised their Morungs as the most excellent institution and the other decried it as an invention of evil spirits.”<sup>39</sup>

The missionaries are often accused of having little sympathy with the aims of the government and even less appreciation of the valuable Naga culture. J.P. Mills lamented: “Of the mistakes made by the Mission, the greatest in my opinion and the one most fraught, with danger for the future is their policy of strenuously imposing an alien western culture on their converts.”<sup>40</sup> He argues that the missionaries hardly studied the Ao custom deeply and they have been ever eager to uproot what they neither understand nor sympathise with and forced a new civilization on the Nagas which was superficial.

Hence we find that the missionaries and the British seemed to have placed the Aos at opposite ends. The choice was left to the people to strike a balance between what was to be discarded and what was to be retained. Toshi Wongtong, in his essay, *Outline of a culture in Transformation*, has suggested that the cultural transformation of the Naga society disturbed the traditional socio-political and cultural equilibrium due to the sudden and abrupt introduction of the new system without providing the knowledge and means of coping with the new system.

While some may postulate that Christianity and modern education have distanced the Ao Nagas from their culture, traditional roots and moorings, they

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<sup>39</sup> Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, Calcutta, 1968, p.56.

<sup>40</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p.420.



still remain closely rooted to their culture and traditions to the core. For instance, no AOs will violate the laws of their forefathers in private or public lives which would incur the wrath of the society. One can conclude that as a result of contact with Christianity and modern education, there was a kind of cultural synthesis in AO land. Selective elements of the past and present intermixed. In the process the new was grafted on to the old order by the AOs themselves.

## CONCLUSION

The advent of Christianity among the Ao Naga tribe heralded a new epoch in their history. The encounter between christianity and the Ao society was marked by conflict from the very beginning. The first chapter of this dissertation shows that in the missionary accounts we have a contradictory picture of Aos. On the one hand Aos are described as savages, barbaric, head hunters and primitive, on the other hand they are presented as exotic people and hosts, and lovers of beauty by the missionaries. The missionary accounts also reveal that initially christianity and whiteman evoked suspicion and reservations in the minds of the Aos. Gradually their attitude towards the missionary shifted: they came to accept and appreciate christian ideas. Christian missionary representation suggest that missionaries were welcomed in Ao land, a representation that seeks to establish the legitimacy of the christian faith in Ao society.

In the second chapter we see how the Ao christian scholars appropriate traditional Ao religion in the light of christianity. These scholars show the importance of myths and legends in the relocation of their history, and they go on to show that the Aos had a meaningful past. The Ao christian scholars criticise the outsiders' observation regarding the traditional Ao religion which white christians had dismissed as being devoid of any reasonable doctrine and moral ethics. The Ao christian scholars bring out the significant meanings that are embedded in the myths, legends and socio-cultural and religious practices of the Aos. In their attempt to build a connection between christianity and traditional Ao religion they tend to christianize their past. They claim that the traditional Ao religion was a

well organised and reasonable religious system with basic ideas and concepts which were similar to christianity and hence served as the foundation for the acceptance and popularization of christianity.

In the third chapter I have tried to bring to light the conflicts and confrontation which accompanied the process of conversion of the Aos to christianity. A comparative analysis has been made between the conflicts that existed within the Ao society and the conflicts that were experienced in other societies in different parts of India. Conversion to christianity entailed conflicts at various levels of the Ao society which generated a good amount of debate on what was to be practised and not practised. Initially conversion took place at the cost of communal unity and village authority.

Trials and errors have been the hallmark of Naga practice of christianity. In the early days of proselytizing, christian missionaries asked the Aos to give up a number of traditional practices which were considered pagan. The confrontation was between traditional Ao socio-cultural and religious practices and the christian practices and teachings. In the process Ao culture and tradition underwent changes, adapting to as well resisting new ideas. In their attempt to christianise the Ao tribe, the missionaries themselves confronted each other with their different attitudes towards the Ao Naga society.

In the fourth chapter, I have taken into account the reports and records of the missionaries which reveal that the educational policy of the missionary for the Nagas was guided by an obsession with the evangelisation. From the very beginning the missionaries saw that an enduring process of christianisation could be only through an appeal to the Aos through word and knowledge.

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