



# **ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NAGAS IN GENERAL AND AOS IN PARTICULAR: LIMAPUR/ ANIMIST AND MODERN- CHRISTIAN CONTEXT.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, I will describe the Ao tribe of Nagaland, surveying their past and present from a socio-cultural-religious perspective. The intention is to help readers understand the socio-cultural and religious transitions that have taken place, as well as to get a clear picture so that there are no negative impressions. It is important that readers understand the paradigm shift that followed the arrival of Christianity. Unlike other communities or cultures, the Nagas turned fully towards Christianity. Today, there are no tribes among the Nagas that continue to practise what they had been practising before the arrival of Christianity. The advent of Christianity marks a very important shift in Naga history. Hence, in this paper, I will survey the ethnography<sup>1</sup> of the Ao-Nagas before and after the coming of Christianity - and with it, modernity. I will deal primarily, however, with the past, and the transformation and transition from the past to the modern era. It appears that culture and traditions of the Ao-Nagas are in the process of transition as the world changes. Therefore, it is important to understand the socio-cultural and religious roots of the Nagas in general, and of the Aos in particular.

<sup>1</sup> Ethnography is a study of human society: people, cultures, customs, habits and mutual difference. "Ethnography | Definition, Types, Examples, & Facts | Britannica," accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/ethnography>.

## 1. THE NAGAS

The name 'Nagas' was not chosen by the Naga people themselves. It was, in fact, given by others on seeing their nakedness.<sup>2</sup> The term 'Nagas' began to be used only after the arrival

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of the British colonialists because, the Nagas used the names of various tribes to identify themselves. The term came into common use during the colonial period and during the formation of the Naga Club in 1918 and the formation of the Naga National Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1946 (united Naga political institution).<sup>3</sup> According to historians, Tibeto-Burman and Mon-Khmer language speaking populations migrated in 2000 BC into Burma and Assam along the Chindwin, the Irrawady, and the Brahmaputra rivers from North West China near the Yang-Tse-kiang and the Hoang-Ho rivers. The Nagas were among these populations.

Thereafter, the Nagas spread across the Kachin State, Burma, Manipur, Cachar, Mikir hills, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong and Arunachal Pradesh. The Nagas, therefore, are one among the Tibeto-Burman language speaking races.<sup>4</sup>

Explorers and western administrators considered the Nagas a well-developed culture who, like the Greeks, build small villages permanently above the valleys in the hills. The Nagas, as a race, could not build community relationships and political. One of the reasons may be that they were scattered across wide geographical areas. They were not easily accessible to one another and this gradually led to tribalism – groups closed within themselves. The Nagas were thus regarded as primitives dispersed across wide areas, but often egalitarian, without extremes of power or wealth. In other words, there were no beggars or no one died of hunger.<sup>5</sup> The Nagas created chaos by invading other Nagas and lived mostly under threat from hostile neighbours. Though they were completely isolated for a long time from other civilizations, such as the Indian and Chinese, owing to impassable mountains, the Nagas were a naïve, happy people, who enjoyed the fresh air in their own world of “animistic philosophy, culture, customs and traditions”, as Asoso Yonou states.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1939), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Panger Imchen, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* (Har Anand Publications, n.d.), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Asoso Yonou, *The Rising Naga: Historical and Political Study*. (Delhi: Manas Publications, 1948), ix–x.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, x–xi. <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, xi.

In many ways, the terms “tribe” or “tribal” may be understood in a derogatory sense in the Indian context. Thus, there is a need for clarification with reference to the tribals in the North East India, especially the Ao-Nagas. According to the Indian historian Ramachandra Guha, the word tribe/tribal brings to one’s mind a general image of half-naked, dirty people, with spears, arrows, with feathers on their heads - a mythical notion of barbaric, savage, animistic, crude, mannerless, uncivilised cannibals. Their lives centred on superstition and they were of dark complexion, with hideously wild and ugly visages. Most of the earlier administrators, historians, explorers, anthropologists and missionaries have used such uncomplimentary adjectives, to describe the tribals.<sup>6</sup> The generally accepted meaning for a tribe is a community with a common ancestral origin, and common ties that binds them together with a close feeling of oneness within themselves. If we look at other Indian tribes in comparison with the Naga tribe, these Naga tribesmen cannot be categorised with Dalits<sup>7</sup> or Shudras,<sup>8</sup> because Naga society is a casteless. Nagas are thus to be regarded as a Federation of Tribes, similar to the Israelite social structure, a federation of tribes of a people striving for socio-cultural-political and religious integration though they might not have a common language.<sup>10</sup>

According to the historians, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826 is regarded as a remarkable day for the Nagas, and recorded in the written history of the world. On this day, the Kingdom of Burma and the British military signed the Treaty of Yandabo. In this treaty, Burma renounced all claims to Assam and Manipur. The Nagas started a nationalist movement demanding its own state, independent of India and Burma, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The upshot of this movement was a bloody conflict between the Indian Army and the Naga freedom fighters. For

<sup>6</sup> Pratap Digal, “De-Constructing the Term ‘Tribe/Tribal’ in India: A Post-Colonial Reading,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology (IJSSA)* 1, no. 1 (2016): 45.

<sup>7</sup> In Sanskrit, Dalit means broken or scattered. Dalits are an ethnic group in India who are subjected to oppression, untouchability and suppression. The word Dalit was acquired by the Dalit community themselves in 1930s. In Indian varna system, there are four casts. Dalits falls below the lowest of the lowest caste, the Shudras. Tragically, rape and sexual abuse on Dalit women are not considered as polluting or crime to men from other dominant castes. TeamAmbedkarite today, “Who Are Dalits: Caste System, Discrimination, Atrocities, Violence, Statistic,” *The Ambedkarite Today - Voice Of Voiceless*, May 25, 2019, accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.ambedkaritetoday.com/2019/05/who-are-dalits-dalit-atrocities-dalit.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Shudras also spelt as Sudra isthe fourth and the last caste in the Hindu Varna system or cast system. In the Hindu varna system, people are divided into Brahmans (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (nobles and warriors), Vaishya (merchants), and the Shudras. Shudras are not allowed to read the Hindu texts or study them. They are the artisans, labourers who do all the menial jobs for the three upper castes. In a wide spectrum, the Shudras are also ritually considered as unclean. “Shudra | Definition, Caste, History, & Facts | Britannica,” accessed November 25, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shudra>.

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

half a century, the Naga hills were branded as a disturbed area and barred to visitors wanting to enter the Naga hills.<sup>9</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1963, the Naga attained statehood. Today, anyone who travels to the Naga hills encounters a totally different socio-cultural context from the description found in old monographs.<sup>12</sup> After the independence of India in 1947, the constitution of India has guaranteed special status to tribal communities. This policy uplifted and integrated the tribals without destroying their identity.<sup>10</sup>

Let us try to understand the context of the Nagas in general, and Aos in particular, during the pre-modern era, before the arrival of Christianity. This will help us to understand the points of distinction between human growth and development in the pre-modern and that in the modern context.

## 2. NAGA LIFE AND CULTURE: *LIMAPUR/ ANIMIST* – PRE-MODERN

### CONTEXT

Anthropologist Verrier Elwin considered the Nagas as fine people, who have their own identity, culture and system of administration. Ethnographers like J. P. Mills state that the Nagas tribes have resemblances to other Indian tribes. Tribes such as the Bondas of Orissa remarkably resemble the Naga-Konyak of Tuensang. The Nagas chisel giant xylophones or

drums out of wood, which they use for communication and sending messages between villages or within the villages during dangers and . Some tribes, like the Semas and Changs, have a hereditary chieftain and the Konyaks have a powerful Ang or Chief who is regarded as sacred and whose word is considered as law.<sup>11</sup>

The Nagas build their villages on the most commanding heights along the ridges of the mountains, or the tops of the valley. Usually, the Nagas divide their village into khels or quarters, each with its respective headman or administrator. In every village *Ariju* or *Morung* was built for young unmarried boys. *Ariju* or *Morung* were considered as guard-houses, recreation clubs, centres for art, education, discipline and the place to perform important ceremonies.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Oppitz et al., “The Nagas: An Introduction,” n.d., 11–12. <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>10</sup> Digal, “De-Constructing the Term ‘Tribe/Tribal’ in India: A Post-Colonial Reading,” 46.

<sup>11</sup> Verrier Elwin, *Nagaland* (Shillong: P. Dutta Research Department, n.d.), 6.

Rice is the staple food for the Nagas, which is often supplemented by meat. Rice beer is the most popular and favourite drink among the Nagas. Rice-beer is considered nourishing, rich with nutrients and less alcohol content. It is considered an important source of Naga energy and strength.

It is believed that Nagas have a strong protocol when it comes to dressing. Great men - head-hunters or donors of the Feast of Merit are those who wear the finest clothes.<sup>12</sup> According to Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, for the Nagas, holding a Feast of Merit<sup>13</sup> is a matter of great social prestige.<sup>17</sup> Nagas are creative and design their traditional attire out of

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cowrie shells, feathers, goat's hair (dyed red), shells, bones, and ivory. Naga textiles have great variety and are woven by women in different colours and patterns.

Nagas are said to have extra-ordinary dexterity in the use of bamboos, wood and iron. The most important and the most basic interest of the Naga is his family, the clan, the khel and the village. The Naga regard these as his culture that no one should interfere with. He is fervently attached to his land, system of land tenure, arrangement of government in the village, organization of cultivation, administration of tribal justice through customary law in the village court. In other words, for Nagas, there is no life beyond their village.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. RELIGION OF THE PRE-MODERN NAGAS

The religion of the pre-modern Nagas is not different from other Indian tribals. The Nagas believed in the existence of a supreme creator and arbiter of humankind, and in minor deities, ghosts, spirits of trees, rivers, and hills. They believe in the unseen forces of nature and that life exists in the natural world. There were medicine men, priests and shamans who would mollify the malevolent spirit: they would banish the spirits that give poor harvests, diseases, famines, droughts and they would invite those that would guard the village, bless

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>13</sup> Feast of Merit reveals the significance of splendour, colour and extravagance of Naga life and culture. Feast of Merit is followed by many ceremonies and sacrificing the sacred animal of the Nagas, the Mithun. This magnificent creature is the chief domestic animal of the Nagas. It is domesticated in the forest in a particular location. Mithun is valuable as currency, used to pay debts, fine or to settle a marriage. Moreover, killing mithun during feast of Merit also brings honour even after death. Feast of Merit is the most grandiose of all the feasts because, the donor of the feast of merit gains honour and respect in the society. Donating towards the feast of merit also indicates one's wealth and prosperity. Poor people cannot reach to the level of donating feast of merit because, the donor would adorn himself and the house with special ornaments. An unmarried man cannot donate or host this feast because the wife plays a very important part during the ceremony. Ibid., 10–11. <sup>17</sup>Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Elwin, *Nagaland*, 9.

the harvest, cattle, marriage bed and would protect the craftsmen from harm.<sup>15</sup> There is a universal belief of life after death among the Nagas. For the Nagas, the soul does not perish at death. We will discuss this further with particular reference to the Aos.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. HEAD HUNTING OR HEAD TAKING

Missionaries, explorers and scholars who have come in contact with the Nagas are shocked that Nagas practise head hunting.<sup>17</sup> The Nagas' reason for head taking or hunting is

complicated, yet intriguing. According to the Nagas, vital energy or the soul resides in the human head. When any village brings an enemy's head, it is believed that the aura of the villages is strengthened, and it makes them more powerful, intensifying the sense of threat to neighbouring villages. The Nagas are by nature war-like and a warrior race. When a young man brings back an enemy's head, he is praised with songs and holds a great advantage in attracting the most beautiful girl in the village for marriage, as well as to rise to a level higher than his friends. To the Nagas, head hunting was more than just war. Head hunting inspired songs, dances and stimulated artistic activities like ornaments, textiles, adornment and decorations.<sup>18</sup> It also was a way to establish boundaries.

#### 5. GLIMPSES OF THE AO-NAGAS IN THE PAST

Reflecting on the past is important to understand the milestones of the present. Like any other Naga tribe, the Aos also have their past glories, civilization and narratives. Aos were one of the important tribes among the Nagas, inhabiting the Naga hills, that separates Assam from North-West Burma.<sup>19</sup> Generally, the Aos never choose a site in a valley to establish a village, but rather the highest point of a mountain range. Their houses are normally closely packed along their streets. For the Aos, naming is very important. The names of places or the names of person generally commemorate a site, or ancestors, or ancient settlements or a memorable past incident. It is somewhat similar to the ancient Israel

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>16</sup> Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Originally, the Nagas were not aware of how to make war until a man learnt from animals. This happened during the time of the Chungliyimti civilization. One day, a bird dropped a berry from a tree, and a lizard and a

<sup>18</sup> Elwin, *Nagaland*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 10.

red ant fought for the berry. Someone was watching their fight when finally, the red ant cut off the lizard's head and thus men learnt to take heads.<sup>71</sup> S9, 71, "Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Contexts.," Oral and questionnaire, 2018. Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, 11. There is a song to this incident as well,

*"Nilasarirmaone – I did not go for war*

*Oh! Jungliyimitenennung – oh at the mount of Chungliyimti*

*Oh! Sangken, - Oh Lizard*

*Sarir ten tongteptiko – fighting with enemies*

*Oh! Nokakunoka – Oh the machete is also mine*

*Jongakujonga - shield is also mine too*

*Korangkükorang – the crown is also mine.* S9, 71, "Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Contexts."

or Jewish tradition of naming. For instance, Longsa village derives its name from the fact that the village is situated on a mountain of rocks. There is great meaning and significance attached to names.<sup>20</sup>

## 6. THE ORIGIN OF THE AO-NAGAS

Every civilization has a story of origin, as do the Aos. Chungliyimti is the birth place of civilization for the Aos. The Aos believed that, at the beginning of time, God sent a tiger, a man and a Spirit or *Mojing*<sup>21</sup> to live together as brothers at *Longterok* hill (six stones). The tiger was the eldest and the Spirit was the youngest and they lived peacefully. They used to offer sacrifices in the forest, when the man sacrificed a pig, the tiger drank its raw blood and resolved to live in the forest to live upon raw meat and blood of animals. While the tiger was leaving, the man requested him to leave some meat for him, if he got a lot of it. The spirit also made a bamboo basket or *Akhang*,<sup>22</sup> without the knowledge of the man and gave it to him. The spirit told the man to leave his share of meat in the *Akhang* at the place of worship while making sacrifices. The *Akhang* is supported on two sticks like a cross.<sup>23</sup> The Aos also believe that whenever the tiger kills an animal, it would leave a half portion for the man and whenever the man would kill any animal in the forest or at home, he would burn the bones or a small piece of meat in the fire.<sup>24</sup> The Aos believe in the mythology that their ancestor emerged from the stones, as in the legendary story of *Longterok* situated at Chungliyimti.<sup>25</sup>

Over the years, when Chungliyimti became populous, the first created men with some other handful of people migrated towards Dikhu River. Some of the men, who were left behind, chased the early men and their group.

<sup>20</sup> J. P Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (London, 1926), 71.

<sup>21</sup> *Mojing* is used as antonyms in the translation of Satan from Ao to English.

<sup>22</sup> A small basket is made out of bamboo that is used to carry load on the head. In this context *Akhangis* made like a basket.

<sup>23</sup> It is believed that the translation of the word cross in Ao is derived from the context of *Akhang* as two sticks like cross were holding it.

<sup>24</sup> S9, 71, "Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Contexts."

<sup>25</sup> Long- stone, terok-six. The Aos believe in the myth that at Chungliyimti, under a big stone, six stones gave birth to three men and three women: Tongpok and his sister Lendina, Longpok and his sister Yongmenala and Longjakrep and his sister Elongshe. Every male member formed a clan, namely, Tongpok as Imsong-Pongen clan, Longpok as Longkümer clan and Longjakrep with his sister as Jamir clan. There were no inter clan marriage, thus Tongpok (Pongen clan) married Elongshe (Jamir clan), Longpok (Longkümer clan) married Lendina (Pongen clan) and their procreation led to a big population at Chungliyimti.

They crossed the bridge over the river Dikhu, which was made of cane-rods, and once the migration party had crossed the river, they cut the bridge so that the ones who were chasing them would not be able to cross the river. The people who were left behind beckoned, asking, ‘Na Aor?’ *Are you going ahead?* ‘Nainimiri’ *you have acted with hostility by not allowing us to cross the bridge.* Thus, the word “Ao” is derived from Aor, which means *going* in English. The Nagas, who live south of the Dikhu River, are called “Miri” even to this day.<sup>26</sup> It thus appears that there is great meaning behind names in Ao culture.

## 7. AO-NAGAS’ SOCIO-CULTURAL CENTRE

### 7.1. Ariju/ Morung

According to the age differences among boys, there are different stages at *Ariju*. All the age groups are engaged with different chores and responsibilities. When a village is formed, and all the houses in the village are constructed, all the members of *Ariju*, young and old, go to the forest to collect raw materials. If the population of the village is high, there will be *Ariju* in every khel, and if the village population is low, there will be only one or two *Ariju*. After selecting the site for constructing *Ariju*, the priest would perform rituals. On the day the construction begins, the elders from the Pongen clan would ceremoniously slaughter certain animals (because the Pongen clan, from the ancestor of Tongpok, is the oldest among the early men). As they sacrifice the animals, the villagers would shout slogans like, ‘May our sons flourish and grow like bamboo shoots and banyan trees and become wise in their *Ariju*.’ To start with, the most senior elder would dig the ground to hold the front main post, and the

other two members who were married, and whose wives were not pregnant (because normally, *Ariju* were meant for unmarried men), carry out the job of setting up the two main posts.<sup>27</sup> Normally *Ariju* were decorated with carvings of tigers, lizards, elephants, snakes, human heads, hornbills and roosters. The carvings were then smeared with the blood of the animals sacrificed by the senior elder. The structure of *Ariju* varies from village to village, but normally it is built either at the highest point of the village so that approaching enemies may be sighted, or near the village gate, to protect the village. It is compulsory for every registered member of *Ariju*

<sup>26</sup> Surendra Nath Majumdar, *Ao-Nagas* (Calcutta: Sailen Majumdar, 1925), 6–7.

<sup>27</sup> N Talitemjen Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture* (Nagaland: Nagaland University Tribal Research Center, 2005), 79.

to bring along with him three bamboo tube water carriers, one head basket of firewood, a grinding stone and a plank of wood for sleeping. These possessions were kept as personal treasures until he graduated.<sup>28</sup> The standard size of *Ariju* is 16.60 by 6.60 meters with a front gable 10 meters above the ground and the height of the rear is about 5 meters above the ground. *Ariju* is usually made of bamboo with no side doors or windows, except two tiny doors in the front and at the rear. An *Ariju* is designed to protect the village from enemies, for the enemies usually attack *Ariju* first, when they raid any village. Apart from the hearth, wood planks for sleeping and other necessary materials, it is a necessary to have bundles of reed torches, a beating drum for dancing and singing inside the hall and a decorated log drum in the courtyard for communication. It normally takes three days to complete the construction.<sup>33</sup> Married men as well as minor children do not become members of *Ariju* and women and strangers are not allowed to come near *Ariju*, so that its sanctity is maintained. Most of the village decisions, discipline, and code of conduct rules are laid down at *Ariju*; and in these ways, stringent secrecy as an institution are maintained.

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The main objective of *Ariju* is to defend and protect the village for which well-organized trained personnel was required. Thus, *Ariju* served multi-farious functions, meeting the needs of social security, civil administration, man power training, personal development and preservation of culture and tradition. Therefore, *Ariju* is the anvil of the Ao-cultural heritage.<sup>29</sup> Training at *Ariju* is like military training, packed with activities that shape individuals towards the perfection of manhood. *Ariju* is highly structured and remains very busy throughout the year, especially, during festivities, and village raids. The winter months are set apart for construction and repairing of *Ariju*. Men at *Ariju* always carried sharp, clean machetes. The first task to learn was trimming and scaling bamboo into strips of raw materials for weaving and braiding.<sup>30</sup> Apart from these activities, subjects on defence, housing architecture, agriculture and allied, industrial, socio-cultural subjects were taught thoroughly at *Ariju*. Besides these serious subjects, *Ariju* inmates also learn songs, make musical instruments out of buffalo horns, bamboo flutes, stringed instruments out of hair, bamboo bangles. They enjoy

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<sup>28</sup> Talitemjen N Jamir, *AsenSobalibaren*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Neeta Prakashan, 1993), 32. <sup>33</sup>Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>30</sup> Jamir, *AsenSobalibaren*, 33.

their life with their age groups. Visits to the girl's dormitory to meet their lovers are the most joyful and unforgettable moments, that add happiness during the stay at *Ariju*. Moatsü is the national festival of the Aos and during this festival young boys and girls are busy, engaged in the service of the community.<sup>31</sup>

## 7.2. Tsüki:

*Tsüki* is old as *Ariju*. Unmarried girls used to sleep over at *Tsüki*. A group of unmarried girls of the same clan choose a widow or spinster from the same clan to be their chaperon. Since boys from *Ariju* usually pay visits at *Tsüki* as well, in the long run they also tend to court. Thus, to avoid inter-clan marriages as well as to avoid any related humiliation, only

one member of any one clan sleeps at *Tsüki*. When a girl grows her hair and gets a tattoo, it is time for her to leave her parent's bed (in olden days, parents and children all sleep together on one bed) and she is considered to be eligible to enter *Tsüki*. So, her father would make a small bed for her to take to *Tsüki*. Since all the unmarried girls would be at *Tsüki*, she would probably be the youngest among the inmates and would obey the elders and serve the host of the house. She would clean her house, fetch water and cook food for her and from time to time she would fetch firewood. While serving the host, she would also help the elders, who usually bring cotton for spinning and braiding the helm of the woven garments. It is understood that, when a girl can take over such work at *Tsüki*, she can be entrusted to take over household responsibilities. Likewise, from serving the host to helping the elders with their chores, the girls attain their womanhood and become sharp in their work.<sup>32</sup> With the passage of time, women become independent and choose to study and strive for white collar jobs. Besides men, education has also uplifted the lives of women from kitchen to workplaces, developing a sense of equality and confidence.

<sup>31</sup> Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture*, 97.

<sup>32</sup> At dawn the girl leaves *Tsüki* and she cleans her house, fetches water, pounds rice, feeds the pigs and the hens, serves food to all her siblings and parents while doing so she learns the art of serving. After all the house hold chores, she prepares for paddy field and leaves home first. Before anyone arrives, she would make fire and clean the barn and the surroundings. Before the others finish their work, she would reach home first, on the way if she sees any elders carrying heavy load she would take turn to take the load from them. After reaching home she would make fire, prepare food for the elders at the field. Before her parents reach home, she would feed the animals, put them in their pens and stys and take care of her younger siblings. She would serve water for bath and food to her parents after their arrival and she would take cotton, yarn and any work as such to work at *Tsüki* and would leave for *Tsüki*. This is the life of a Ao-Naga girl at *Tsüki*. Her hard work, purity and dedication will be known to the villages through the chaperon/ *Tsükibutsüla*. Boys who visit *Tsüki* would observe such a girl with an eagle's eye and admire to be her maiden. While she has sharpened her skills at work, service and appealing manners and etiquette, she would tattoo her legs which signifies that she is now ready to take care of her own household. By this time suitors would approach her and *Tsükibutsüla* for hand in marriage. Jamir, *Asen Sobalibaren*, 37–38.

*Tsüki* plays a very important function in developing confidence among the *Ariju* inmates. Both *Tsüki* and *Ariju* affect the inmates psychologically. All the boys would try their best through achievement and development of inner qualities, so that they may woo the most attractive member of *Tsüki* as well as will be most loved themselves. At the same time, the

*Tsükir* (inmates of *Tsüki*) would prefer the most handsome, brave, rich and talented bachelor from *Ariju*. Thus, the *Ariju* boys were always active and smart, and tried not to leave any room for criticism. In the past, women would prefer men who made a name for themselves by being great warriors, because that assured the women of safety and protection. There was fierce competition among the *Ariju* and *Tsüki* of different khels or colonies to be the best and champions in every sport and activity. Though the boys can visit *Tsüki*, girls could not visit *Ariju*. Hence, the chaperon becomes the best informer of all the news and happening at *Ariju*. *Ariju* and *Tsüki* were considered as the best instructional institutions in Ao society, since time immemorial.

Today, *Ariju and Tsüki* can be remembered only as part of the past glory of the Aos, because the importance and existence of traditional institutions were lost with the abandonment of head-hunting and with the arrival of Christianity and the start of education. Now, most of the young boys and girls in the village pursue their education in towns and cities. Boys and girls who do not go to school or live in hostels, live with their parents until they get married. *Ariju and Tsüki* no longer exist in the real sense but stand like a display that is found in a few villages. With the diminishing of the *Ariju* system, it appears that the moral quality of society has lost its true value.<sup>33</sup>

### 7.3. Religion

Morality and religion are two separate codes for the Aos. Religion is not considered as a moral code. Religion is set aside for ceremonies and sacrifices to appease the deities and spirits around them. They believe that if sacrifices are not offered to the deities they will not be blessed with a rich and abundant harvest or will suffer some illness or some other such disaster. The Aos address all the gods as *Tsüngrem*, but believe in one Supreme God, *Lijaba*

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<sup>33</sup> Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture*, 99.

and address him as, *Lijaba Ali Yang baba Sangram* (Lijaba creator of the earth, men and plains, holy spirit).

Since *Lijaba*, the Supreme God, made everything, the Aos believe that spirits resides in the forest or stones or river.<sup>34</sup> The Aos used to worship the sun and moon. They believed that spirits dwell in sacred stones, mountains and trees and hence, they worship them.<sup>35</sup> One of the famous sacred stones that the Aos worshipped was *Changchanglong*.<sup>36</sup> The Aos also used to offer sacrifices to *Mangchilung*<sup>42</sup> (a corpse-eating boulder). The villagers used to offer sacrifices at *Mangchilung* to bring fine weather.<sup>37</sup> The Aos considered spirit-possessed stones as sacred stones and worshipped them so as to have good fishing, harvest, to conquer enemies and gain other material benefits. Thus, worshipping sacred stones were considered as the most common and important form of worship. While worshipping sacred stones, the assigned person normally sacrifices a pig and two fowls or a dog. Apart from the sacred stones, they offer sacrifices in the fields to the land spirits for good weather, harvest and protection of their crops from animals and locusts. During important sacrifices, a fowl is let loose. It is believed that if any one eats the meat laid on the stone or the freed fowl, he/she will go mad.<sup>38</sup>

One of the festivals that the Aos observe and celebrate as their national festivals is *Moatsü*<sup>39</sup>(day for blessings), which is usually celebrated in May and *Tsungremmong*<sup>40</sup> (the day of the lord), which is celebrated

<sup>34</sup> Majumdar, *Ao-Nagas*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, 215–216.

<sup>36</sup> Changchanglong is a huge boulder that stands at the very top of the Changkikong range between Waromong and Dibua village. It is said that Changchanglong is not a malevolent spirit nor benevolent too. He would warn people in dreams about the future or enemies' attack. Annually a member from Kabzur clan with Molir clan as his assistant. In return, the clan member get to cultivate a piece of land with any disturbance from the spirit. While crossing Changchanglong one dares to spit, erect his spear or treat the place disrespectfully. If so, a huge storm takes over the village. After arrival of Christianity, missionaries have cut down the huge tree that was growing on the rock. Ever since the spirit has been active in and out of people's business. Ibid., 217. <sup>42</sup>Mangchilung stands at Merangkong village at Langpangkong range. During war the corpse around the stones were gone but the stones were covered with blood. Hence, they name the stone corpse eating stone. At Longsa village of Ongpangkong range there is Kharalung, *tortoise stone* because it look like a tortoise. This stone used to warn certain people in dreams about the looming enemies or the plans of the enemies hence, the villagers used to offer sacrifice of one pig and a cock at the shrine annually. Ibid., 218.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Majumdar, *Ao-Nagas*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Once all the seeds, and paddy are planted the community prays for protection from insects, caterpillar, enemies, natural calamities and blessings for rain and good harvest. This act of seeking blessing is observe commonly known as the day of Moatsü. During Moatsü festival, friends celebrate honouring and respecting each other with equality without any difference and distinction between the rich and the poor. Warriors, owners of the land and laurels will adorn themselves with traditional attire according to their merit, achievements and bravery. With this attire they will visit from house to house singing and dancing, feasting on the finest of the rice wine and delicacies. Usually, the Aos celebrate *Moatsü* for three days. On the first day the second age group süngpur will get leaves for plater and firewood to burn at *Ariju*. All the household will get firewood for themselves to celebrate at night. On the second day, young men will play sports, boys and girls will sing and dance and lovers will exchange gift they have made. On the third day they will dismantle all their farming tools as a sign to show that the task is over. Guru Rongsennungba Jamir, "Moatsu Celebration among the Aos of Ongpangkong Range," Oral and questionnaire, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> The Aos celebrate this festival just before harvest. Like *Moatsü* festival, young men play tug of war with thick jungle creeper, they go dancing and singing farmhouse to house. Young and middle age women will brew rice beer. This wine will be served to

in the month of August. *Tsiingremmong* and *Moatsü* festivals are celebrated in all Ao villages in honour of all the gods in general. The Longsa village, Ungma and Mokokchung villages of Ongpangkong range celebrate first, followed by villages located on other ranges.

## 8. SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSITION OF THE AO-NAGAS TO THE MODERN

### CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

#### 8.1. Food habits of the Aos:

Aos are not vegetarian by origin, meat is among their favourite dishes. Males eat the flesh of almost all animals except elephants, snakes, and crows, but there are certain restrictions. Young unmarried men and men in their mid-life cannot simply eat the flesh of all animals. For example, eagles are considered as old as creation and hence only men in their old age are eligible to eat their meat. Similarly, even women are restricted from eating certain animal flesh because they have to keep their wombs sanctified, and not get defiled. Some of the foods that women eat without restrictions are pork, chicken, venison and fish. For women, strict restrictions are imposed when they get her tattoo. Once a woman gets her tattoo, she

\_\_\_\_\_ eats only chocolate, mahseer river fish (river fish with silver scales). The Aos use sesame seeds, fermented soya beans and dried yam paste. But, the most common spices that the Aos use for cooking are bamboo shoots, dry and fermented, wild black pepper, and chilly.<sup>41</sup> The Aos consume plenty of chilly and salt. Locally brewed rice beer is one of their favourite drinks. It is brewed using the yeast of certain leaves. Some women at Longsa village used the leaves of solanum berries to brew rice beer. The Aos do not use metal pots for brewing, and they would rather use a dry gourd shell or a pumpkin, because they enhance the taste. The Aos were also fond of smoking locally made tobacco.<sup>48</sup> In some villages, some of the elderly gave up smoking pipes very late in life.

In comparison to the pre-modern period, there is not much difference in terms of diet. Even today, the Aos are very fond of animal flesh and fish. Food habits of the men mostly remain the same, but the women in the modern period do not follow strict diet like the women of the pre-modern period. During the initial years of Christianity, drinking locally brewed rice beer was condemned as sin and the skill and traditional method

every visitor with pork and other delicacies. At *Arijuboy*s will sing, dance and enjoy great merry making until they run out of firewood to keep the night warm and bright. Majumdar, *AoNagas*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> S9, 71, "Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Contexts." <sup>48</sup>Majumdar, *Ao-Nagas*, 24.

were lost over the years. Instead, the Aos have become very fond of red alcohol drinks from the plains, which are more harmful and addictive. This has become a matter of concern for churches today.<sup>42</sup> For other Naga tribals as well as for the Aos, the use of opium has been one major concern that has hampered the growth of the church. Offenders are excommunicated from the church. In 1894, the Ao, Molung church was banned because the new converts would not give up opium.<sup>50</sup>

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## 8.2. Lifestyles

The missionaries or historians may be of the opinion that the so-called savage and barbaric lifestyle of the Aos has totally changed. The lifestyle of the Aos was not only about head hunting. There were other aspects that enhanced the quality of life like social support, harmony, and considerate and fair relationships. It is upon this enhanced quality of life that Christianity and education have led the people towards modernity, and this, in turn, has changed the personality and worldview of the people. The socio-cultural-moral ethics still remain, to some extent – for example, the so-called *Aor sobaliba*<sup>51</sup> [*Soba: to be born* and *liba: to live.*]. *Sobaliba* is very important for the Aos. *Sobaliba* covers a wide understanding of their socio-cultural ethics, values and customs. It also covers the areas of their original roots, customary laws and administrations. The concept of *Sobalibais* applied in daily situations like manners or the etiquette of greeting one another, decision-making during divorce, death or marriage or during serious situations. Thus, *sobaliba* means, to be born and to live, and this is the pattern of life in Ao terms, though they are modern and advanced, like any other civilized society. During the shift from *Limapur* to Christianity, a negative understanding of the concept of *sobaliba* developed among the people<sup>43</sup>. The Aos laid their guard down regarding maintaining the importance of *Sobaliba*. *Sobaliba* is still practised in important matters, and in some circumstances, it overlaps or comes into conflict with Christian principles. When such situations occur, the elders of the clan go by ethical principles that are balanced by both Christian principles and Ao *Sobaliba*.<sup>44</sup> Today, when

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<sup>42</sup> S1, 87 et al., “Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Context, Longsa, Ungma.,” 2018. <sup>50</sup>Frederick Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, vol. 5 (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992), 147.

<sup>43</sup> Initially the Christian Aos held *Sobaliba* parallel to culture, and when they say culture they have an image of traditional attire, its meaning associated to it because only the head hunter or warriors could wear ornaments of ivory. Moreover, during traditional festivals people would usually drink, sing, dance and celebrate in merry making. These activities were held in opposition to Christianity. Hence, like throwing the baby with the tub, confusion between culture and Christianity has caused greater loss to good tradition practised from generation to generation which is *sobaliba*.

<sup>44</sup> S2, 87, “Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in the Pre-Modern Context, Longsa.,” Oral and questionnaire, 2018.

young people do not practise *sobaliba*/ cultural values sincerely, there is a real threat of extinction.

### 8.3. Marriage

Like any other culture, marriage is very important for the Aos. Aos have patrilineal and nuclear families. Incestuous relationships are taboo in Ao community. Men and women follow exogamy. The man builds his own house and the girls leave their parents and go to live with their husbands. Earlier, the Aos used to get married by the time they attain the age of 20 years. In the past and even today, the task of proposing marriage lies with the men. The elders of the clan, as well as family regard secret marriages as well as eloping to get married as invalid. Thus, when a man and woman fell in love, arrangements were made without delay to get married. For the Aos, barren couples do not adopt children at random. If any couple wants to adopt a child, they would adopt a male child from their clan only and not any outsider. The adopted child can inherit his foster parents' personal property, but not ancestral property.<sup>45</sup>

Due to contact with other civilizations or because of Christianity, the Aos have moved beyond their boundaries both mentally and spiritually. The people who have been confined to themselves, have now moved out to marry people from other communities. In fact, Christianity has contributed to breaking this barrier among the Aos.<sup>46</sup> Today, significant changes are seen in the marriage system. Unlike the early era, today there are inter-village, inter-tribal, inter-faith, and cross-cultural marriages taking place, which were not possible in the past. However, in spite of this major change in the social system and practices, the family structure and the clan-endogamy marriage, which evolved since the *Longtrok* civilization, remains unchanged. Though some aspect of *Sobaliba* is practised, the Christian marriage system and its procedure have replaced the traditional system of marriage.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Jamir, *AsenSobalibaren*, 68–69.

<sup>46</sup> It is recorded that after establishing the first church at Molungyimsen, some of the Ao girls married Christian men from the plains. Hudhon of the plains married Noksangla on April 4, 1878, Kenowar of the plains married Risonglaon May 27, 1878, Gunanath of the plains married Noksangla on June 24, 1880, Hodhun of the plains married Imnütüla on February 19, 1885. This gives us the evidence that which castism was at the peak of practises, Christianity has broken the shackles for the Aos to move beyond their boundaries. TialaImchen, *Ao Kin DangiKhristanYimsu Aruba (The Coming of Christianity to the Ao- Nagas)*, First. (Dimapur: S. P. Printers, 2017), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Traditional – pre-modern system of marriage: man would give some river fish to the girls family as a sign of declaration that he has proposed to the girl. After which he would build a house and take his share of paddy field from his father. The girl will till enter his new home with weaving tools, baskets, bamboo mats, a pair of sarong and her attire. She can take in as much as household necessities. The elders from both the clans would assemble, give them words of wisdom and publically declare then as

#### 8.4. Status of Women

For Aos Sobaliba/ cultural values were an essence to be a human being, there was no domestic violence in Ao society in the past. Society and cultural values condemn any many who would lay their hands on women. Any man who laid his hands on a woman was considered as cowardly and effeminate.<sup>48</sup> Heavy manual work was not assigned to women, but they were given the responsibility for nurturing the family, a most important task. Women were expected to fill the gap and tend household chores, which may sound light to the ears but in reality quite a task.<sup>49</sup> When it comes to the status of woman in Ao society, unlike in the past, women are not considered inferior to men. They are considered as good as men. According to the Naga sociologist, Lanunungsang, though the family and the social system is patriarchal, Ao women enjoy a higher status than those of other communities of the world, in terms of recognition, roles in society, and participation in socio-economic development and change. With Christianity, education and modernity, women's leadership has proved to be on par with men. Educated Ao women are found to be approachable and encouraging, not only in socio-economic fields, but in many other sectors like education, religion, and in governmental and private sectors, and in institutions.

### 9. PROPERTY RIGHTS AND INHERITANCE

Both movable and immovable property in Ao society are as follows: land - ancestral and self-acquired - residential property, granaries, ornaments, clothing, utensils, livestock, weapons and machineries. Since Naga society is patrilineal, the father is the head of the family. The property owned by the father is passed down to the eldest son of the family. No one can sell or divide ancestral property. According to Ao customary law of inheritance, if the father dies, property is always inherited by the male members and it is passed down to brothers, nephews, cousins and so on.<sup>50</sup> However, after marriage, an Ao woman does not lose her clan title nor

husband and wife. Rich people used to hold a big feast as a treat from the married couple. S10, 86, "Human Development of the Ao-Nagas in Pre-Modern context, Longsa.," Oral and questionnaire, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> "RIG-McFayden-Narola.Pdf," n.d., 2, accessed December 13, 2021, <https://religiouseducation.net/rea2014/files/2014/07/RIG-McFayden-Narola.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> S3, 75, "Human Development of the Ao Nagas in the Pre-Modern Context, Longsa.," Oral and questionnaire, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture*, 232. At the demise of the father all the sons has the right to own the property equally even if the sons are from different mothers, even an illegitimate son but he gets to choose the last when all the legitimate sons gets their shares. For the Aos the eldest son holds great privilege to choose the portion of his choice among the property. At the demise of the father, he is also responsible to divide the property among his brothers. If the man dies without any sons his property would go to

does she take her husband's title. While leaving the house, the woman is entitled to take jewellery and traditional attire owned by her mother. If a woman has personal belongings or an inheritance from her father, her son has the right to inherit it; otherwise, it will go back to her father's clan. In the modern period, women can inherit personal property from her parents but not ancestral property.<sup>51</sup> According to the Ao tradition since ancient days, widows of the deceased does not hold any right to inherit property except for temporary sake. For instance, unless she get re-married she is allowed to stay in the house, allows her to cultivate a portion of paddy field until she desires to stop. The widow can only own for herself furniture, clothes, utensils, her clothes and jewellery. In a joint family, the widow

does not live with her husband's family. The widow loses what she was provided once she remarries or become unchaste.<sup>52</sup>

## 10. HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE AOS

The knowledge of the history of Christianity among the Aos in this research is not new. It has been discussed in fragments where need arose. As we are looking at two contexts premodern as before the arrival of Christianity and modern period as a Christian era for the Aos, it is important to understand the history of Christianity among the Aos in detail. It has already been discussed about the context of the pre-modern Ao socio-cultural and religious aspects. In order to understand the present context clearer in terms of lifestyle and human development it is important to understand how Christianity became a part of Ao's culture, what was the process of evangelizing Christianity, how the people responded and build its foundations.

### 10.1. The Root of Christianity

If we ponder how did the Gospel travelled such a long way to the Aos, it was when the American Baptist Foreign Mission came to India to plant the Gospel. Briefly, let us look at how the Gospel has journeyed in India. Adoniram Judson and his wife Ann Hasseltine with a team of missionary came to India on February

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the kinsmen. In the modern generation except ancestral land, the other immovable and movable property is shared among the daughters.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 231–232.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 233.

19, 1812. Adoniram Judson's family were sent to India through American Congregational Church. Judson's father was a pastor in a Congregational church. In the ship while sailing many months to India, Judson came across Baptist teaching and decided to become a Baptist while listening to the teaching of the New Testament from Baptist believers. After arriving in India Judson's family approached English Baptist Missionary, Dr. William Carey and his team to become a part of Baptist denomination. Judson also wrote letter to American Board of Commissioners. On September

6, 1812, on Sunday morning Dr. Clark baptized Judson's family at Calcutta Lal Bazar Chapel. American Baptist Foreign Mission was born on this day.<sup>53</sup>

American Baptist Foreign Mission has stationed their Mission base four times: Calcutta, Sadiya, Jaipur and Sibsagar. Coming to the point of initial mission journey, English Baptist Mission, Calcutta decided to commission missionary to Burma because Burma was neighboring to Assam. In order to aid to both Assam and Burma in printing books for school education Maj F. Jenkins<sup>63</sup> promised to help the missionary and English Baptist Mission was established at Guwahati. Through establishing mission center in Sadiya, the goal was to penetrate Burma, its neighbours and eventually China.<sup>64</sup> The plan was not as easy as it was planned. In the year 1839 on January 28, while the British and the American Baptist Foreign Mission were still stationed at Sadiya, Khamti tribe wage war against Sadiya. During this battle, British Colonel White and many other soldiers were killed. The aftermath of war led the American Baptist Mission to shift their mission to Jaipur. Rev. Cutter took over publication and school work where as Rev. Brown continually focused in preaching the Word of God. They took great responsibilities according to their great abilities.<sup>54</sup>

Rev. and Mrs. Miles Bronson and his family reached Jaipur and took charge of the mission. Jaipur is closer to the Naga hills as compared to Sadiya. With the vision to spread the Gospel to Assam, Burman and hill tribes between Assam and Burma, in the year 1840, Rev. and Mrs. Nathan Brown, Rev. and Mrs. Cutter and their families arrived at Jaipur. In order to help Naga Mission Rev. and Mrs. Cyrus Baker and Miss. Rhoda

<sup>53</sup> Imchen, *Ao Kin Dangi Khristan Yimsu Aruba (The Coming of Christianity to the Ao- Nagas)*, 22–23. <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23. Maj F. Jenkins served as a commissioner of Assam. His father was Rev. Jenkins, a pastor.

Commissioner Jenkin's Christian background contributed greatly towards spreading mission towards East India. <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 26.

Bronson arrives at Jaipur on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1840. The Barkers family stayed back at Jaipur but Miss. Rhoda went ahead to do mission work along with his brother Bronson and his family. At Namsang a

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huge plaque broke out and many people died, Miss. Rhoda died<sup>55</sup> of the plaque on Dec 8,

1840. After the death of Miss. Rhoda, Bronson's left the Naga hills.<sup>56</sup> Mission in the Naga hills were terminated. Thirty years after the Bronson's have left the Naga hills, Gospel reappeared through Dr. Clark.<sup>57</sup>

The third American Baptist Mission was stationed from Jaipur at Sibsagar, Assam.

Rev. Barker and his family arrived at Sibsagar<sup>58</sup> on 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1841 and established American Baptist Foreign Mission Center and started planting churches.<sup>59</sup> All the missionaries at Jaipur arrived at Sibsagar along with the printing press machine in the year 1843. After which the missionaries start translation work and print books in Assamese language. Within 29 years, missionary at Sibsagar encountered the Nagas who came down to the plains for commercial purposes. Initially, Assam political situation was unrest and on top of that the Nagas used to add trouble. Nagas were in the impression as headhunters and savage. Therefore, there were no proper channel for the missionaries to convey the Gospel among the Nagas. Mr. Hubi of

Konyak tribe was the first man among the Nagas to be baptized. Rev. Nathan Brown baptized Hubi on September 12, 1846. Hubi was the hope to be the vessel of the Gospel for the Nagas but he died the same year.

The second person after Hubi was Longjanglepzüik of Merangkong village from Ao tribe. He was baptized by Rev. Whiting in 1851. It is reported that

Longjanglepzüik was a good follower while he was at Sibsagar for two years. Unfortunately,

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he was killed while he was on his way to his village to propose marriage. The konyak tribe raided Merangkong village Longjanglepzüik died in the hands of the enemy. Similarly, some baptized Nagas were send to the Naga

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 27. Miss. Rhoda is considered as the first missionary to the Nagas who laid down her life for the sake of the Gospel.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. When Rev. Bronson left the Naga hills he was very heart broken to leave lost souls with a shepherd. Looking at his letter, he is considered as the missionary who loved the Nagas deeply.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 27–28.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 28. Sibsagar is a plain area not so far away from Brahmaputra River. Roads for transportation are well made at the same time among the hills, it is closest to the Naga Hill. During the reign of Ahom kings, Sibsagar was known as Rongpur (king's play house). Sibsagar is like a meeting point for the hill people and the people from the plains to exchange business as well as to extend friendship. During this period Sibsagar was like a corridor accessible for travelling, transportation at the same time it was also one of the stations for British administrators.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 29. Guwahati Baptist Church was started on January 8, 1845, Nowgong Baptist Church on February 8, 1845, Sibsagar Baptist Church on March 9, 1845. After establishing these three churches, the first Assam Baptist Conference was held on October 30, 1851 at Sibsagar.

hills from Sibsagar but the Nagas refused to accept this new religion. This reaction left Mission work among the Nagas stagnant till 1869. During this stagnation period, Rev. and Mrs. E. W. Clark arrived at Sibsagar from America in 1869 while Assamese convert Godhula Brown was serving as an evangelist. Like an opportune time of

God, during this drying times religiously, the Naga hills were hit badly by famine and plaque. People could not work in the field due to plaque as well as locust did not spare the land too. It was during this time, the Nagas embraced Christianity.<sup>60</sup>

#### 10.2. Dr. E. W. Clark: From Sibsagar to the Naga Hills.

American Baptist Mission Board commissioned Dr. Edward Winter Clark to work at Sibsagar printing press and to work among the Assamese. Dr. Clark saw Nagas<sup>61</sup> often at Sibsagar and felt the call of God to evangelize among the Nagas. He wrote a letter of proposal to rekindle mission among the Nagas to the Mission Board in America. While Rev. Clark was still tackling with the burden upon his heart to reach out to the Nagas, he met them face to face. One day, a group of Ao men from Molungkimong which was then known as Dekahaimong came to their house and the leader, Mr. Sübongmeren persuade Mrs. Clark to buy their herd of goats. Both, Dr. Clark and his wife were spellbound with the appearance of the Nagas.<sup>62</sup>

During the time when the Aos were negotiating Dr. Clark to come to the Naga hills, the hills neighbouring to Assam such as the Konyaks and the Aos were hit by a famine which

stayed for a long time. In order to escape famine, the Aos went down to Sibsagar apart from commercial purposes. This is the dawn of Christianity for the Aos. When Dr. Clark and evangelist Godhula planned to visit Molungkimong, the British administration and the American mission board was not willing to send them concerning their safety. Language was the first concern for Dr. Clark and Godhula. Therefore, with the help of elder, Supongmeren and some village elders, the first Gospel song and prayer were composed using indigenous

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 32. Dr. Clark often saw Aos and Konyaks at Sibsagar.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 33. In one glance the Clarks knew that they were head hunters from the hills. They had less clothes on their body but they were adorned with warrior attire and adorned with long female hair around their waist. They looked dirty but they used flowers and cotton as ornaments on their ears. This ornament caught Dr. Clark to think that the Aos are lover of beauty. The Ao men folks were also awestruck when they saw Dr. Clark teaching letters to the Assamese on a slate. Later Mr. Sübongmeren approached Dr. Clark to come to the hills to teach their children. Dr. Clark was afraid as they kill their enemies by cutting off their heads, but Mr. Sübongmeren affirmed that they do not kill friends and that he is their friend.

tune and context.<sup>63</sup> When the villager sang these songs loudly with full traditional attire Dr. Clark proclaimed that a new day has started for the head-hunting Naga tribes. This is how Christianity started among the Aos. The Ao tribe was a corridor through which the American Baptist Mission spread the Gospel to the neighbouring tribes such as the Lotha, Sema, Sangtam, Chang, Konyak, Phom, Khamniungan and Yimchunger tribes.<sup>75</sup>

## 11. CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN EDUCATION: A NEW LIFESTYLE

With the coming of the Gospel, the Aos have struggled to submit to a new lifestyle. Even after the arrival of Christianity, slavery was prevalent among the Aos. Powerful villages like Longkum, Ungma, and Chuchyimlang had hundreds of slaves. The Baptist missionaries petitioned the government to end slavery among the Aos, which finally took place.<sup>64</sup> One of the major concerns of the missionaries for the Aos was hygiene and cleanliness. They lived together with domestic animals in one chamber of the house, and they would rarely bathe or wash plates as the water source was generally far from the village. In fact, when the first session of the Ao Naga Association was held at Molung in 1897, apart from discussing prayer, evangelism, Holy Spirit and benevolence, one of the main issues for discussion was how to bury the dead.<sup>77</sup>

Another great matter of concern for the missionaries was clothing and hair style. Some people may blame Christianity for introducing western clothes, but in the case of the tribals in North east India and among the Aos, people were usually less covered or they left their upper bodies uncovered. In order to promote decency and safety, measures were needed to impress on the Aos that it was important to cover their bodies. The Aos retained their traditional hairstyle for a long time, since they always had short hair.<sup>65</sup>

Aos love festivals and celebrations and Christianity has revolutionised the Aos way of celebration. Traditional life has been replaced by a new order under a new guise in a new era. For instance, *Ariju* and *Tsiiki* have been replaced by Christian hostels, Feasts of Merit have been replaced by the Christmas feast. Celebrations take place not only during Christmas but even during church annual gatherings.<sup>66</sup> As a *Limapur*, the Aos used to abstain from sexual intercourse when they offer sacrifices and during important days set aside

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 39. "Yihova nung sangang – praise the name of Yehova"<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 40, 109–122.

<sup>64</sup> Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 5:151. <sup>77</sup> The Aos used to roll the death corpse in a bamboo mat and leaving the bodies on raised platforms outside the village. Ibid., 5:155.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5:153–157.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 5:167–168. <sup>80</sup>Ibid., 5:168.

for raiding the village, hunting and the like. Likewise, the Aos observed Sunday worship very seriously, as well as abstained from sexual intercourse, sleeping over at the field on Wednesdays and Saturdays so that they might attend the vesper service.<sup>80</sup>

The Aos were the first among the Naga tribes to accept Christianity, and this has led to the Aos being the frontrunners in many fields in Naga society – largely, due to modern education that came with Christianity. From the beginning of 1877, Aos became the pioneers in planting churches in Nagaland. As a result, the Nagas had the first graduate from the Aos in 1927 (Mayangnokcha from Changki village). Thus, privileged to be the first community exposed to Christianity and modern education, the Aos became instrumental in the making of a new epoch in Naga history.

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From a literacy rate of zero in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, today Aos have reached a literacy rate of 80-90 percent. It is an undeniable fact that Christianity is the key factor that has brought a sea change in Ao society. Within a few decades, the Nagas accepted Christianity and abandoned the old animistic/ *Limapur* belief system.<sup>67</sup>

As one reviews all the wonderful works of the missionaries, it appears that, for the Aos, conversion had social implications. When converts reform their lives while those who don't convert remain the same, the converts develop a new attitude towards other people. It appears that among the post-nineteenth century converts, there was a shift in the way they did things, but it seems that there was no fundamental change in their understanding of the covenant with God. Just as they had certain expectations while they offered sacrifices in the past, subconsciously, even today some Aos believe in God, expecting blessings in this life and blessings in the next life, just as they did as *Limapur* (pre-modern) people. The Aos failed to understand that to have these blessings, one needs to have a transformed life. The Aos in general cannot be wholly at fault because the foreign missionaries and indigenous preachers taught them to believe in liberation from all ills, abundant blessings and free entry to heaven if they believed in the new religion.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Jamir, *Naga Society and Culture*, 323–332.

<sup>68</sup> Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 5:173.

From the above overview, we have understood the context of the Aos from both sides: as *Limapur* and as Christians, and the social transition and transformation involved. Though there have been changes on the social level, one wonders what is embedded or latent in this social and religious transformation. What was the impact on human growth and development in the process of socialization in the Christian context? To fathom this, we need to understand Erikson, the human development theorist, and James E Loder, who has contributed largely to understanding the impact on lifestyles through the processes of socialization and

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transformation, the importance of Christian conviction for the transformation of the ego, as discussed in the Literature Review.

## CONCLUSION

We have presented the socio-cultural and religious context of the Nagas in general and Aos in particular. Looking at the data, it appears that the Nagas and the Aos were happy, content, friendly and hospitable people. Their moral codes and ethics were not determined or controlled by their religion. It was purely consensus of their conscious mind and community consensus. Moreover, they are lovers of beauty who love their culture dearly at the same time their minds are active and open to new social order. When the songs and prayers were first composed contextually, identifying the God with the tribal God, there were great enthusiasm among them to embrace this God. Initially, when rules on Christian living were imposed among the Aos men folk pull away from the Church. If we ponder what could be the reason for the decline in the church. The possibility could be their difficulty to depart from the activities that connected them with their belief and beliefs. Such as, a part of Arijju, drinking rice beer and dancing on festivals, their attire, songs and stories and head hunting were all at once cut-off from their personal and social life. The activities that define their identity and social life suddenly vanished in thin air. were all cut-off. Gradually perspectives on lifestyles and Christianity have changed over the years. Apart from the Aos and Nagas if we happen to research other tribal communities there will be tendency for similar situation like abandoning cultural values in exchange for Christianity and education. There is also a possibility that the force of socialization into Christianity must have led to understand faith in a new

perspective putting the believers in a situation of wedge between the mind and the heart. Consciously or unconsciously forcing the Christians to lead a double life.<sup>69</sup> At the same

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time we ponder, what if Christianity has never set among the Aos. What religion could have influenced the Aos, how they might have been living. One never knows, the Aos must have taken up religion of the neighbouring state Assam and might be living under the oppression of the caste system. Christianity is liberative and transformative though some cultural values were lost along the way with the understanding of the cultural extinction some cultural values which are not contradictory to Christian values can be still preserved. Like any other people in the primitive or pre-modern period, the Aos share strong bonding and communal harmony among their own people within the village gate. It may look selfish or self-centred on their part to give importance to their own people only but it was a matter of safety and protection.

We will look at these contexts in the light of Durkheim and Weber's theory. Applying these theories in the contexts of the Aos will help us to understand the human development of the Aos and the contribution of changing culture in the contexts of Christianity and education. In the introductory chapter I have explained in details about the Aos in the modern context. Even if religion and social setting might change, identity is always pegged to the root and its origin. Hence, the past will enable us to see and understand the present context deeper. Likewise, we will apply sociological and psychological theories to understand human growth and development in the pre-modern and modern context. Above all, in the final conclusion we will look at the contexts from a theological perspective. To begin with we will look at the theoretical framework and the theorists to understand the blueprint of human development in these two contexts. In the following chapter we will look at Erikson, Loder, Durkheim, Weber and Parsons, their theories and approaches in understanding human development from, psycho-social and theological perspectives. Theoretical framework is the bases of the research which will help us to understand the tool to explore human development of the Aos from broader perspectives.

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<sup>69</sup> Diogenes Allen, ed., *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, U.S., 1989), 1.

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**INTERVIEWS**

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