CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS
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General Beliefs and Practices

The Angamis believed in the existence of Supreme Being called ukepenuoppu (god) and worshipped in different ways in different villages according to their own traditions and practices. They worship their god or kepenuopfu in any place whenever required, be it at home, road, field and any other place. Though the Angami Nagas believed in the existence of god or kepenuopfu and worship it, it is difficult to say to whom did they offer their worship. They believe in the existence of a supreme deity or God and in many other evil spirits, God is known among the Angami Nagas as ukepenuopfu or kepenuopfu or terhuomia. Ukepenuopfu or kepenuopfu means our mother or birth spirit. Ukepenuopfu is the highest of all god. Terhuomia is another type of god having personal names and unnamed spirits of various types and character which are worshipped by the Angami Nagas. Mr. Lhouchalie of Merema village¹ said that the religious practices of the Angami

¹. Mr. Lhouchalie, Aged 80 years of Merema village, interviewed on 2-5-1995.
Nagas are very difficult to understand, but their services to god or kepenuopfu was very clear which was sacrificial in nature. J.H. Hutton writes:

In approaching a subject as the religious beliefs of the Angami, one is met at the outset by an obstacle of great difficulty. In common with other savage races the Angami regards the supernatural in general from a point of view that is sublimely vague. So vague is his idea of the deities and spiritual beings in which he believes, that he makes no attempt whatever to reproduce in carving or in picture the mental image which he forms of them, if indeed any clear formation takes place in his mind. Polytheist he may be, but he is no idolates.

Hutton continues to say that:

Thus Gods are made And whoso makes them otherwise shall die... though, on the other hand, he is very definite as to the manner of their service. He has a very clear idea of how gods should be served, and that whoso serves them otherwise shall die, if not physically, at least socially. 2

In all the important festivals and works of the seasons, the Angami will remember their god or kepenuopfu and offerings will be made in his name by the individual, family, clan and village. They have the unique practice of prayers and offerings to god or kepenuopfu, at the

time of starting a new work, be at individual level, family, clan or village. Mr. Bizo Punyu of Khonoma vil-
lage stated that the year when a person made successful business in some trade or in some crops he would give a feast to other people as a token of blessing received from god or kepenuopfu. It is interesting to note that although the Angamis make offerings to god or kepenuopfu before they go for any venture, the traditional practice of offering even before anything is taken is also worth noting. The Angami Nagas used to throw some food from their dishes in the name of god or kepenuopfu before taking meals. However, this practice is not prevalent among all the Angami villages. No new venture or travelling or hunting was taken without having a test of dreams. The dreams were regarded as god's or kepenuopfu's desire and whenever people have bad dreams at night, they would never take to hunting or travel. However, even with the occurrence of an unexpected dream on the eve of departure for business etc. no Angami would take up trips. Whenever they go for business or other works a prayer to god or kepenuopfu asking blessing will be made. Mr. Golatuo Zinyu of Khonoma village stated that while going for

3. Mr. Punyu Bizo, Aged 73 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 9-4-1994.
hunting the Angamis used to go for another prayer to their god or chukhe-u. The Angami Nagas called the god of animals as chukhe-u. Therefore a prayer will be made to chukhe-u to help them to get some animals in hunting; and in case one is caught the hunter would cut a little portion from the animal's ear and would throw it by saying it was for chukhe-u. It was also believed if a little portion of the ear is not cut then the flesh would not be good as it ought to be. It was also the practice that when a group of Angamis went hunting, the eldest one would have to take food, smoke or drink first after they have crossed the wooden gate and only after that other members of the group would be entitled to partake. They believed that if such a practice was not followed the hunters might have some physical ailment in future and so no risk was ever taken by them. However, as usual whenever a joint hunting trip was made with people of different clans of the village, instead of testing meal by the elders of each clan, Thevo* or Kemevo** who was

* Thevo is a clan (Thino) used to be considered as one of the eldest among the Angami family members of a clan. In some villages the Thevo (clan) will direct village religious ceremonies.

** Kemevo is another important place of the Angami people. In some villages Kemevo is a place belonging to the founder of the village. In many villages such founder will direct the village public ceremonies. It is also hereditary in some villages.
called priest will test the food though he may be younger than the other males of other clans. This practice is still followed among the non-Christian Angami Nagas till today.

**Taboo**

The Angami Nagas used to observe and practise different taboos in the whole year from time to time. Some of the taboos are very strictly observed by the individuals as well as the whole village. Some of the taboos are observed during different festivals. Sometimes taboos are observed by the individuals or family depending on the situation of the family life. According to Mr. Pusazo Nyikha of Viswema village, taboos are characterised by three words: (1) Penie, (2) Kenyu, and (3) Nanyu.

(1) **Penie**

Penie is considered as taboo and such a period of time is considered as non-working period. It is called a prohibition period. The Angami Nagas have different types of penie (taboo). There can be a penie due to death of a villager whether it is a natural or unnatural death. Penie is also observed in the village if the hunters of different villages dividing the meat and also due

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to natural disasters like flood, storms, etc. If a penie is announced in the village, the village people will never go to their fields nor do their domestic work but will take rest for the whole day as it is to be a non-working day for them. The penie of such kinds are due to hail storm, wind, heavy rain which destroy crops, and earthquake, solar and lunar eclipses and fire havocs, etc. in the village. By observing a non-working day, the Angami people pray to their god or kepenuopfu that such natural calamity should not come again. But some of the penies are not considered that important and people can perform their domestic works even if they have penie, like the death of a person, Dzukhupfe, Chuza etc. Here Dzukhupfe means cleaning the village well and Chuza means dividing animal meat after hunting between two villages.

(2) Kenyu

The Angami Nagas observed many kenyu. Kenyu means 'forbidden' which can be applied to an individual, family and also to any member of the village or villages. In case of an individual, if a person is sick, the family members go and ask a witch or wizard and offer to evil spirits whatever is suggested by the witch or wizard. In many cases, fowl, egg or pieces of iron etc. are required to be offered as stated by Mr. Neizovi of Kigwema.
village. For the birth of a new baby, kenyu is observed by a family for five days, during which period the family members do not take up any work. The Angami Naga villages also observed kenyu for five days during the sky-ceremony (Teitho) festival in the month of September/October every year. During these five days, the villagers are not allowed to bring new things like utensils, domestic animals, cloth etc. as stated by Mr. Nochol of Khuzama village and Mr. Nichuriazo of Khonoma village. Persons violating this practice are punished as per village traditional rules.

(3) **Nanyu**

The word Nanyu relates to the ceremonies of individual, family and the villagers. Mr. Ketholesie writes, "Nanyu refers to ceremony or rituals as such relating to penie and kenyu. It can either apply to the ceremonies of any individual or community."

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6. Mr. Neizovi, Aged 64 years of Kigwema village, interviewed on 23-8-1993.
7. Mr. Nochol, Aged 63 years of Khuzama village, interviewed on 5-5-1995.
The Angami Nagas observed many **nanyu** in their traditional religious practices. Mrs. Nipuseno of Kigwema village said that in the event of the death of a family member the close relatives of the family (sub-clan) observed **nanyu** or taboo for two days but the members of the deceased family will have five days **nanyu** during which no domestic works are undertaken but simply stay at home. It has been found that similar practices are also followed in other villages of the Angami Nagas.

**(3a) Tsiekra Nanyu**

Tsiekra is another branch of **nanyu**. Tsiekra means sowing seed. It is another important **nanyu** (taboo) among the Angami Nagas which are practised in the same way in all the Angami villages. In **Tsiekra nanyu**, one of the elder males in the village is selected to be the first sower of seeds. In the event of the death of the first sower of seed, another sower will be selected from the same clan (thino) in the village but it is not a hereditary one. A suitable day is announced by the villagers on new moon day. However, some other conditions of the villagers like sudden death of a person, etc., are also looked into while fixing the date. No such

activity is undertaken in the event of death of a villager during the period. When the person selected to sow the seed goes out of the village wooden door-gate and saw the seed in a particular place, the whole village will observe that day without doing their domestic work but the sower of the seed will observe the ritual for five days at home. One the day of the sowing of the seed, the strangers are not allowed to visit the village and even the village people will not touch insects. The above information was given by Mrs. Setsou of Gariphema village. The same view was supplemented by others too.

Mr. Mhodi of Khuzama village stated that for the ceremony relating to sowing of seeds the eldest among the villagers is selected and he sows the seeds after the new year and he will continue till he dies. A second person is selected for the purpose in the event of his death. It is interesting to note that on the auspicious day of seed sowing if there was a visitor in the house of the seed sower, he will not talk to him on any matter. Although exact cause of maintaining silence could not be established, it has been stated by Mr. Lhouchalie


12. Mr. Mhodi, Aged 64 years of Khuzama village, interviewed on 5-5-1995.
of Merema village that the villagers believe that discussion on the ceremony with others might lead to poor yield of crops. The seed sowing ceremony is observed in all villages in the similar way, but the time of sowing seed differs from village to village depending on the climatic conditions. Generally the seeds are sown in the months of February and March.

(3b) Tekhusekhru Nanyu

Tekhusekhru is another nanyu (taboo) in Angami villages. Tekhusekhru means starting of rice plantation in the terrace field. It is a season for terrace cultivation. As in the case of sowing seeds, the eldest among the villagers is selected to initiate transplantation of seedling in a terrace field, and no other activities are taken up on that day as in the case of sowing of seeds in the village. Transplantation of paddy seedling in their terrace cultivation field can be done only from the next day onward, which is taken up in May or June. The functions relating to terrace field are practised in all the villages in the same manner in all the Angami areas. Mr. Soukielie of Merema village, Mr. Thepupil

13. Mr. Lhouchalie, Aged 80 years of Merema village, interviewed on 2-5-1995.
of Khuzama village and Mrs. Nipuseno of Kigwema village while endorsing the above views said that the sower of the seeds can also be the first transplantor of paddy seedling in the terrace cultivation field. In some villages the sower and transplantor has to be separate persons. Mr. Sie-u Chucha of Khonoma village stated that the sower of seeds cannot do again the work of first transplantor of seedling and so the work is given to two different persons. Mr. Neiliehou of Kohima village said that they used to select sower and transplantor separately for their village and the same person was not allowed to take up both the job.

\(3c\) **Liede Nanyu**

Liede means starting of harvest reaping. The Liede nanyu can be performed only after the festival of Thekenyi (of Southern Angami Group) and Khupfenyi (Northern and Western Groups) is over. Thekenyi and Khupfenyi festivals usually celebrated in the month of September or October. This Liede nanyu is observed for


16. Mr. Neiliehou, Aged 79 years of Kohima village, interviewed on 1-5-1995.
two days. In almost all the Angami villages Liede nanyu is performed. A woman from the village is chosen to go to the field to reap the head of paddy to be followed by others on the next day. In the Gazetteer of India, Nagaland, Kohima, a reference of the above practice has been made as:

A woman reaper goes to the field and cuts a few heads of paddy, she will tie the stumps of rice (hays) and have a piece of mud, worm-cast pasted them. When home she has brought them, she opens her mouth to taste. This ceremony marks the opening of the harvest. Next day is Mechu (Public) Liede and penie (taboo) for every one, and on the following day it is open to every onee in the village to reap as he pleases. 17

Like other nanyu, Liede is observed and practised in different days in different villages.

(3d) Gida Nanyu

The Gida nanyu is another taboo and is observed by most of the Angami villages. Gida means removing the unclean. This Gida nanyu (taboo) is performed when a woman gives birth to a child or when a person falls sick for many days or months. Mrs. Yielhubiu of Khonoma village 18 said that Gida nanyu is performed in order to

throw away the unclean things when a woman gives birth to a new baby. Unless this Gida ceremony was performed, she and her child will be considered as unclean and it is believed that if her husband goes for hunting, he will not have any luck in shooting animals. It is also believed that observation of such a ritual could give relief to a sick person in the family. The particular ritual is performed in a family by inviting a clan priest who would sacrifice a fowl. The process involved in a Gida ceremony is also worth recording. The date of Gida nanyu is fixed in consultation with the priest (Zievo). On the appointed day when the priest (Zievo) visits the house, a fowl, small pieces of bamboo and a piece of wood are given to the priest. With all these things in his hand, the priest (Zievo) will pronounce the recitation and blessing to the person, and after finishing all these he will come out of the house taking the fowl, pieces of bamboo and a piece of wood to the road and will cut the fowl's mouth, legs and wings on wood and pieces of bamboo. After performing it, the priest (Zievo) will go to his house and the family members will observe nanyu on that day. The person on whose name it is performed will not do any domestic work on that day but the rest of the family can do any kind of work at home but will not do any work in the field. Similar practices are found in almost all other Angami villages.
Another common nanyu (taboo) was performed in all the villages in the Angami Naga regions in which animals like pig, cow and mithun were used for sacrifices in case a person dies, but sacrifices depended much on the economic status of the family. Mr. Nochol of Khuzama village and Mr. Neizieo of Nerhema village \(^{10}\) shared the same views on this religious ceremony. It is stated that pig, cow and mithun were killed and the meat was distributed among the members of the sub-clan, clan and other relatives. The sub-clan will also observe two days without doing any domestic work but the family will have to observe for five days. It is stated that the meat will have to be eaten on the day itself by the clan, but the other clans (Thino) in the village could keep it for many days. Among all these rituals, the ceremonies connected with death of a person are quite lengthy and difficult to follow.

The concept of the presence of some evil spirits is discernable among the Angami traditions. A person falling sick would mean some influence of evil spirits which could be recovered only by offerings of fowl, egg,

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etc. to the evil spirits. If a person is not recovered from his sickness and passed away, it is believed to be the desire of the evil spirits. Therefore, such sacrifices are made in the name of evil spirits in all the families once every year to keep the family members away from the influence of such spirits. However, it has been observed from the versions of the people that the traditional practices are too difficult to follow and such religious practices among the Angami Nagas are deep-rooted to their life style. James Johnstone says:

The Angamis, in common with most hill-tribes that I have come across, have a vague indefinite belief in a supreme being, but look on him as too great to injure them. They believe that they are all subjected to the influence of evil spirits, whom it is their constant endeavour to appease by sacrifices. Every misfortune is, as a rule, ascribed to evil spirits, and much money is spent on appeasing them, the usual way being to offer fowls, of which the head, feet, and entrails are offered to the demon, with incantations. The other parts are eaten by the sacrificer. 20

The Angami Nagas used to offer domestic animals in the name of their god or kepenuopfu since olden days and still continues among the non-Christians even today.

Some of the offerings were made to its gods according to season. Mr. Vipelhou of Kigwema village \(^{21}\) stated that every year in the month of May, Kigwema villagers used to offer two cocks to Japfu and is observed by the whole village for one day by abstaining from other works. Japfu is a mountain in Nagaland and the taboo (nanyu) is called Japfusia, as sia is to die. Therefore, Japfusia means Japfu died. This taboo or nanyu is done in the belief that the Japfu range would bring rain to their village in time so that seeds can be sown in the right time of the season.

Khonoma villagers also offer fowls to their god or Terho-u two times in a year. Mr. Visieu of Khonoma village \(^{22}\) said that in order to please their god or Terho-u a fowl is offered two times in a year. The first one is observed in the month of July or August depending on full moon and the second one is observed in November or December. In this offering one of the elders will take the cock along with a spear who will lead the group to the top of the village early in the morning before they take any meal. This taboo or nanyu is called Terhase.

\(^{21}\) Mr. Vipelhou, Aged 65 years of Kigwema village, interviewed on 22-5-1994.

\(^{22}\) Mr. Visieu, Aged 75 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 5-4-1995.
The whole village will observe the taboo or nanyu on that day. The village people will not take journey on the day and even the stranger will not be allowed to visit the village. Khrieleno Iralu writes:

Sacrifices are offered for appeasement of the gods. The cock is the most popular choice of offering. It is sacrificed at every important event and the flesh is usually consumed during the ceremony. Pig, Mithuns and cows are also used. Animal sacrifice on some occasions is considered as 'Substitution' (Uphousou Phulu). Pieces of iron, drink, rice, frills of cloth and beads are also offered to god (Terhomia). 23

The Angami Nagas are very strict in their offering and observing taboos by the individual, family and the village. It is found that if it is a nanyu, kenyu is observed by the individual or family, and is observed very strictly according to traditions. Strangers are not allowed to visit their house. Neither will they be talked by them. During the penie, kenyu and nanyu are observed when the villagers will not do their domestic work, neither will they take a journey on that day. In observing some of its taboos, they will not touch even insects and will prevent the visitors and strangers from coming to the village gates.

It is believed that the Angamis have been practising their religion even before they migrated to the present district of Kohima. This indicates that they had carried these practices from their earlier homeland. At the time of data collection from different villages, the elderly people failed to give details about the origin of all the Angami religious practices. Mr. Kovisie Yano of Kigwema village expressed difficulty in telling me the origin of the Angami religion (animism) and its concepts, as he said, they have been practising and following what was transferred to them by their forefathers. He said that the religious beliefs of the Angamis were deep-rooted and strong before Christianity. Richard M. Eaton writes, "The Angamis seem to have had a relatively more stable religious system than other Nagas, just as their agricultural system was more stable." 

The Priest or Zievo

In every village in Angami area, the village people keep three or four priests or zievo but the total number of the priests depended on the clans. If the village has five clans, one will have one each, but in

24. Mr. Yano, Kovisie, Aged 59 years of Kigwema village, interviewed on 3-7-1994.
case of less number of clans, they may have a common priest. The priests of the Angamis play a very important role in all religious ceremonies. It has to conduct all the important public religious functions. Mr. Lhouchalie of Merema village stated that the priest in the village has the duty to perform all the important religious ceremonies of the individual, family and the village. He will direct all the nanyu (taboos) if one wants to perform religious ceremony at home. He will go to the house and taste the rice beer and meat before anybody takes it. He will bless the husband and wife if such things are performed in the family. After the priest has taken the first sipping, others can eat the meat and drink the rice beer prepared for the feast. He will receive some of the raw meat and rice beer which he could bring to his house as well.

There are two kinds of priests that are found in the Angami villages; one is called Kemevo and the other is Zievo.

Kemevo

The role of Kemevo is considered important in the religious ceremonies. It is observed that Kemevo

26. Mr. Lhouchalie, Aged 80 years of Merema village, interviewed on 2-5-1995.
will perform some religious ceremony in his house and if such things are conducted in his house (Kemevo Phe) their clan will be invited to his house to have food. Domestic animals like pig or fowl will be killed in such religious ceremony. Mrs. Nipuseno of Kigwema village\textsuperscript{27} said that the Kemevo can use the seed of paddy from others in case of shortage, but the seedling of paddy which he uses if left after use cannot be given to others. The Kemevo cannot dispose of or sell his residential plot. It is a hereditary in nature. After the death of Kemevo his youngest son will occupy his position.

\textbf{Zievo}

Zievo means priest, who will perform all the religious ceremonies in most of the villages in Angami area. The Zievo or Priest is not hereditary in its function. The Zievo in a village is selected from among the elders of the village and the same practice is followed everywhere. The Zievo will perform all the important religious ceremonies in a family. Mr. Khrieze-o of Merema village and Mr. Dietho-u of Khonoma village\textsuperscript{28} informed of a religious ceremony called Phichupelhie performed

\textsuperscript{27} Mrs. Nipuseno, Aged 52 years of Kigwema village, interviewed on 5-5-1995.

\textsuperscript{28} Mr. Khrieze-o, Aged 54 years of Merema village, interviewed on 8-5-1995. Mr. Dietho-u, Aged 74 years of Khonoma village, interviewed on 19-11-1993.
in all villages conducted by Zievo. Phichupelhie ceremony is feast of the elders. The Zievo, in such case will go to the house of the family who wants to have Phichupelhie early in the morning before taking any meal. When they arrive at the house, they will taste the meat and rice beer and bless the family and will chant the religious rituals. On completion of all the religious ceremonies, the Priests or Zievo will be given meat and rice beer. Only after that the family members give feast to others which might continue for five days in distributing meat and rice beer, etc.

The Angamis respect the position of the Kemevo and Zievo in their society, as they consider these people as most highly placed people in religion and rendering social services to their community. In some villages the whole villagers will help the priest or Zievo in his work in the field. Mr. Doneilhou of Tuophema village said that if a person arranges feast to his relatives or clan he will present a small piece of raw meat to all their priests in the village. In the event of the death of a Priest or Zievo or Kemevo of a village the

29. Mr. Doneilhou, Aged 63 years of Tuophema village, interviewed on 3-5-1995.
village will observe one day as a holiday as a token of remembrance and respect to his office.

The role of Priest or Zievo or Kemevo even today occupies the highest place in religious and social functions, in most of the villages in the Angami society where Christian population is less. However, the Priests (Zievo) are not seen in villages with Christian population. The Priests (Zievo) are involved not only in the religious functions but also took active part in agriculture, political and social processes in many villages of the Angami Naga community.

The Priest or Zievo plays the most significant role in the society. He has to perform all the important nanyu (taboos) for individual, family and village. His blessings to the people in the village is considered as one of the important contributions that he can make to the people. Mr. Krusapa Sile-o of Phesama village stated that Priests (Zievo) are important persons to be honoured in the village for their responsibility towards our well-being by performing all religious functions. Thus it is found that the Angami Nagas followed

30. Mr. Sile-o Krusapa, Aged 71 years of Phesama village, interview on 22-5-1994.
strict religious practices in all their social, religious as economic pursuits in accordance with their traditional beliefs and ceremonies.

The propagation of Christianity among the Angami Nagas has changed the religious concept of the people. Many people accepted Christianity and those who still follow animism also do not wholly worship their gods or kepenuopfu in the way it was observed earlier. Mr. Keviyiekielie Linyu writes:

In the past days there was a constant fear of evil spirits. This fear still continues, the belief in the existence of evil spirits is still there, but no longer is this fear dominant. Christianity came with the message of victory. Christians today believe that Christ is stronger than the evil spirits. They no longer offer sacrifices to please and keep away the evil spirits, but drive them away by saying "Go away, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ."