CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

5.1. Introduction

In order to study and understand the life patterns of a borderland society, exploration and understanding of cultural practices and religious beliefs of such a community is vital. These practices and beliefs shape their life-worlds and their relationship with one another. This is especially because of the trans-border nature of such beliefs and practices. Similar to other aspects of borderland, religious beliefs and cultural practices are not confined to the nation-state constructs of political boundary but rather share a cultural space that transcends such socially constructed notion of border. This testifies the notion that cultural boundaries often transcend politico-legal boundaries.

For most of the tribal communities, cultural practices and norms are closely interwoven with their religious beliefs. The interconnectedness makes it difficult to strictly differentiate between tribal culture and religious beliefs. Similarly, the Naga traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices are closely related. Though the Nagas had a very vague idea of religion in the past, yet they believed in the existence of a ‘Supreme Being’ and also of evil spirits. Every Naga tribe believes that there is an unseen divine power behind the creation of the universe. Many anthropologists and sociologists assumed the Naga traditional religion as animism, paganism and heathenism. However, according to a Naga scholar, A. Nshoga, “the traditional Naga religion cannot be simply accepted as animism because they believed and worshiped a number of deities. He states that the Naga traditional religion or tribal belief is a multifaceted religion with the combination of theism, animism, supernaturalism, superstition, shamanism and lycanthrophism” (Nshoga 2009:194).
5.2. Traditional Konyak Religion

Akin to the other Naga tribes, the Konyak Nagas also have their own traditional indigenous religion which they call Longjing Pesao Te Khümpu (Walim 2005:11). A Konyak scholar, Yanang, calls the traditional Konyak Naga religion as “Animism” (Yanang 1986:15). However, we find that the Konyak traditional religion is more than animism because there are other features of Konyak religion such as lycanthropy, shamanism, supernaturalism and superstition besides animism.

5.2.1. Concept of God and Spirits

Prior to Christianisation, the Konyaks believed in the existence of many gods and spirits such as god of heaven, earth, forest, river, fertility, etc. However, among these gods and spirits they believed in the existence of a supreme God called Kahwang. Kahwang is believed to be a male by the Konyaks, though no one has seen him. He is often addressed as Kahwang Youngan which literally means the “Lord God” (Walim 2005:11). Fürer-Haimendorf (1968:100) writes that Gahwang is invoked in most cardinal events in the life of the Konyaks. These events include marriage, construction of house, festivals and hunting. This is evident even in daily life, for instance, whenever a Konyak sits to eat, he throws a morsel of food inviting the Kahwang to eat first.

The Konyaks also believe that the Kahwang sees and hears everything, and as such angered by violations of moral code of conduct. He was also believed to be the upholder of justice as well as the punisher of wrong doers. Thus, he punishes those people committing moral breaches such as lying, stealing, inciting quarrels, unfaithful

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88 Some Konyaks called Kahwang as Gahwang. But the author prefers to use Kahwang.
husbands and wives, etc. The Konyaks believe that punishments often come in the form of premature death, sickness as well as barreness or deprivation of male offspring. At the same time, the Kahwang is believed to be the rewarer of those people who practice social virtues such as hospitality and generosity.

Along with Kahwang, the Konyak Nagas also believe in the existence of spirits, both benevolent and malevolent. The spirits are called Kahshih. These spirits are believed to live in places like thick forest, rocks, mountains, rivers, etc. The Konyaks often appeased these malevolent spirits and offered sacrifices such as fowls, dogs, pigs, buffaloes and mithuns. These sacrifices are offered to appease the spirits so as to prevent the outbreak of epidemics and death.

The primitive indigenous Konyak religion had neither shrine nor temples. Rather, they had an altar for common worship which is called Shaojong (Chingang 2008: 28-30). The altar is considered as the most important and most sacred place in the village. Every Konyak village had an altar within its vicinity. All the offerings and sacrifices are offered on the altar to please the spirits or gods. Besides these, they also performed certain rites when they hunt enemies' head during the headhunting raids. The Konyaks also had their village priest and priestess, who performed rites, rituals and offered sacrifice on behalf of the people. They are known as Ngengpa. They are considered as mediators between men and Kahwang (Chingang 2008:18-19). The priesthood is hereditary in some cases, but in many cases an elderly person can become a priest. The priest or priestess performed rites and rituals during the construction of a new house, cultivation of fields, festivals, sickness and deaths as per the instructions from the Kahwang. They also offered animals to the deities to avert misfortune, deaths, epidemics, wars, diseases, etc. In some instances, the spirits or ghosts are believed to
lead or lure human beings into jungle. To avoid such occurrences and to call back the
soul of such persons, the priest or seer would sacrifice roosters and eggs to appease the
spirits. Besides these functions, the high priest would perform an important duty once a
year during the Aoleng festival by revealing the fate of the villagers for that particular
year.

Along with the priest/priestess, the Konyaks also had the Hipa who are
considered as prophets or seers (Chingang 2008:19). These people are believed to be
gifted with supernatural powers and could foretell about the impending events like
misfortune, sickness, war, peace or any other accidents which may occur in the future.
It is also believed that they have the power to heal the sick person by means of releasing
the spirit of the person that has been held captive by the evil spirits. As per the demands
of the evil spirit, the Hipa would sacrifice a fowl, goat, dog or pig, etc., on behalf of the
sick person’s family. The Hipa is also believed to have the power to reveal secrets,
identify persons, places and objects. Fürer-Haimendorf (1939:208) mentioned three
persons possessing such faculty in his book The Naked Nagas. These were Lemang of
Kongan village, Shopong of Tanhai and Limnia of Wakching village. It was believed
that they were not only prophets or seers but also possessed the spirit of tiger, thus they
were called “were-tigers”.

5.2.2. Lycanthropy

Lycanthropy is another salient feature of the Naga traditional belief. This was very
popular especially among tribes such as the Sumis, Aos and Konyaks. The Konyak
Nagas believe that the Ahngs, priests and Hipa have the “tiger spirit” (Yanang 1986:19).
It is believed that the soul of these people take the forms of animals such as leopard,
tiger or snake. The origin of such faculty is shrouded in mystery because even the lycanthropes cannot exactly explain how they received such nature. Nshoga (2009:208), a Rengma Naga scholar, pointed out that there are three ideas regarding the development of lycanthropy. The first belief claims that lycanthropy is developed by drinking contaminated water from ponds which are under the influence of evil. Another idea claims that lycanthropy is developed from the possession of certain evil influenced stone. While the other belief claims that lycanthropy is developed from eating the meat influenced by evil. Though these beliefs express vague ideas about lycanthropy, they do not have evidence and scientific explanation.

Despite the lack of evidences and scientific explanation, there is common perception that whenever the tiger or leopard killed other animals, the “were-tiger” or the ‘leopard man’ would gnash his teeth throughout the night and his belly would be full. It is also believed that whenever the hunters chase the tiger, the lycanthrope would feel restless and move about. If the tiger is injured, wounds would be found on the body of the lycanthrope. Moreover, it is also believed that whenever the tiger is killed, the man who possesses a tiger spirit would also die as soon as he hears the news about the death of the tiger. Fürer-Haimendorf (1939:213) narrated his personal experiences with Limnia, a “were-tiger” or lycanthrope from Wakching village. In order to satisfy his curiosity, the anthropologist approached Limnia and asked her to foresee his future, whether he would have safe and peaceful return and also to see whether his relatives were doing well or not. On being asked, Limnia shared her experiences about her dream life when her soul went to Yimbu, the Land of the Dead. She promised to dream for the anthropologist that very fateful night and see the things for him. The next day she
affirmatively responded that the anthropologist would return home safely. This belief still exists even today among the Konyaks, especially about the Ahngs.

5.2.3. Taboo

In the pre-Christian era, taboo occupied a central figure in the religious and social life of the Nagas. The word taboo is referred to genna in Assamese and penna in Angami (Hutton 1929: 1). In fact, taboo acted as a strong force of social control in the past. In simple word, taboo can be understood as prohibition or abstention from doing certain activities. It is just a temporary halt of normal activities such as going to field, hunting, fishing or crossing the village gate, etc.

Taboos are observed individually as well as collectively. Individual taboos are observed by families, whereas sometimes the members of a particular clan or the whole village observed taboos collectively. Individual taboos or family taboos are usually observed during pregnancy, child birth, child naming, piercing of ears and first hair cutting. During such auspicious occasions, the family members are expected to perform certain rituals and offer sacrifices. They are not expected to go and work in the field. Moreover, visitors especially strangers are not allowed to enter the house. This is because they believed that visitors might bring diseases which may affect the entire village. They also did not allow people to come because visitors may also come in the guise of enemies targeting to kill the villagers.

The community or village taboos mostly revolved around the agriculture operations such as selection of field sites, sowing and reaping, and also during festivals,

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89 The term ‘Taboo’ is originated from the Polynesian term ‘tabu’ first noted by captain James Cook during his visit to Tonga in 1777 who later introduced the English translation as ‘taboo’ (Nshoga 2009: 209-210).
deaths, raids, diseases and natural calamities. In such taboos, all the members of the village would observe total cessation of work except for the priest or priestess who performs the rituals. Animals such as pigs, *mithun*, fowls, etc., are sacrificed in order to appease the deities or gods. It is believed that breach of such taboos would invite diseases, death, natural calamities, crop failure, etc., in a particular family or even in the village.

Among the Konyaks, taboo is known as *Nyúobu* or *Nyöonyapu* (Chingang 2008: 39). *Nyúobu* is observed to appease the spirits or deities and thereby people abstained themselves from work. It is observed during unnatural deaths, disease, child birth, earthquake, eclipse, sowing of seeds, etc. These taboos may last for one day or even for several days. During such taboo, the villagers are prohibited from working in the field and couples are prohibited from any physical intimacy. Visitors from other villages are not allowed to enter the village during such observance (Yanang 1986: 21).

5.2.4. Concept of Life after Death

Every tribal community has its own concept of life after death, however vague it may be. Similarly the Konyak Nagas also believe in such a concept. They believe in the immortality of the soul that goes to the land of the dead called *Yimching* or *Yimpuching* or *Yimbu*\(^{90}\). Though no one knows the exact location of *Yimching*, it is believed that all the souls of dead persons live together there, which resembles the life on earth. Further, it is believed that the dead persons work in their fields, celebrate festivals, marry and have family and eventually die again. After the second death, they would go to another *Yimching* where they would continue to work and continue with their lives.

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\(^{90}\) Different writers used different names.
The Konyaks also believe in the judgement after death. It is believed that on the way to *Yimching*, there is a judge or gatekeeper known as *Dolonyu* or *Likoksatangba*, whom all the departed souls must pass through. The judge would ask every soul about his/her works on earth. If the judge is satisfied, then he allows the person to go to *Nyoimei* or the good way and those who had done wicked things are sent to *Nyoeming* or the bad way. It also believed that the priest or the shaman can enter the land of the dead in their dreams and retrieve the soul of some persons back to earth (Fürer-Haimendorf 1969: 89-90).

The points discussed above are some of the traditional beliefs among the Konyaks and their concept of world view, life after death and existence of god and spirits. These beliefs are closely related to their culture which they practiced simultaneously in the past. A discussion on the traditional Konyak culture will surely enrich our understanding on their primitive religion and its relation with people's way of life.

5.3. Konyak Traditional Culture

The Konyaks have a unique and vibrant culture which is closely associated with their religious beliefs. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to draw a separating line between their religious beliefs and cultural practices due to closely interwoven nature of the two in the lives of the Konyaks. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall attempt to highlight some important aspects of Konyak cultural traditions of the past.
5.3.1. Dress and Ornaments

The well-known anthropologist, Führer-Haimendorf in his field work among the Konyaks entitled his book as *The Naked Nagas*, which in some way was justified by the scantily dressed Konyaks. In the past, the Konyak men seldom wore nothing more than a tight belt and a small apron to cover their private body parts (Führer-Haimendorf 1969:12-13). Even women wore only short skirt of about 10 inches to cover themselves, though the pattern of skirts varies among the commoners and the royal family. Moreover, there are special dress for ceremonies and festivals. In place of clothes, the Konyaks adorned themselves with ornaments such as bead necklace, headgears, armlets, earrings, bracelets, cane leggings, etc. Some prominent people especially the ‘head takers’ and *Ahngs* wear magnificent headdress with animal horns and bear furs and also brass necklace consisting of several miniature human heads.

Apart from clothing, the Konyaks also followed a typical style of hair dressing which differed among the *Thenkoh* men who had short hair and the *Thendu* men had long hair, tied up in a knot at the back of the head. Besides this mode of dressing, the Konyaks also blackened their teeth with a black substance obtained from the burnt bamboo or charcoal. This process of blackening of teeth is called *fayak* (Chingang 2008:58) which helps in preventing toothache and foul breath.

5.3.2. Tattoo

Among the Nagas, the Konyaks are considered as unique for their tattoo marks on their faces, chin, neck, chest, arms and legs. For them, tattoo was also a pattern of dressing and a symbol of identity. The origin of tattoo among the Konyaks, based on oral

91 Head takers are the one who took heads during the head hunting raids.
narratives, has been expounded by Chingang in *The Konyak Naga: Yesterday and Today* (2008:8-10). According to this narrative, there was an incident which took place in a place called Yingnyu hong, where the inhabitants went for hunting. They killed a very strange animal and distributed among themselves except that of an old widow. After eating the strange animal, the village started losing its prosperity. There was crop failure, sickness and turmoil. As a result, the villagers decided to leave the present site for a new village. In the meantime, the royal family moved towards the northeast region. Instead of offering and seeking for Kahwang's guidance, the people blamed him for the misfortune. Consequently, there was an earthquake which destroyed the entire village except the house of the widow.

On hearing the occurrence of such a calamity, the larger group in the eastern side was filled with fear. They decided to do something to distinguish themselves from the other group. As a result, they marked their faces with the mixture of frankincense, juice of a particular plant and black powder obtained from utensils. This news also reached the other group who were punished by Kahwang. Subsequently, they also marked their faces. However, there was a small group who did not mark their face but marked their chest. Later on, tattoo becomes very a significant symbol of identity among the Konyaks. The marking of tattooing marks the transition of a person’s life from teenage to adulthood. Whenever a warrior hunted a head, all his age grade members would have the tattoo along with him. It is found that marking of tattoo is normally done by women from the chiefly house. As for women, they are tattooed twice, the first one on reaching puberty and the other, right before their marriage.

During the 20th century, these groups of people were bifurcated by by J.H Hutton and J.P.Mills as Thenkoh and Thendu on the basis of their tattoos (Fürer-
Haimendorf 1969:9). Among the Thendu people, tattoo is done on the face whereas the Thenkoh have tattoos on their chests. Women of both the groups have tattoos on their legs but Thendu women have tattoos on their faces like their male counterparts.

Longwa falls under the Thendu group and therefore we find old menfolk and womenfolk having tattoo marks on their faces, chest, neck, legs and chin. In Longwa dialect, tattoo is known as Huh Tu. In Longwa village, the practice of tattoo continued till 1974. Though headhunting raids were banned since 1950, the villagers enacted the hunting raids on wooden effigies and performed rites. Subsequently tattoos were marked on all the members of the age grade. This continued till 1974 when the last batch of men was tattooed in Longwa.  

5.3.3. Headhunting

Headhunting practice and tattooing are closely related as discussed above. The Konyaks are considered as one of the bravest Naga tribes famous for their headhunting raids. Headhunting was a common practice among the Konyaks in olden days which continued till the 1950s despite the banning of headhunting by the government. The Konyaks considered headhunting as the highest valor, and the man who could collect many heads was considered as a naomei or warrior. With this achievement, he could acquire the rank and tattoo of a head-taker. According to Konyaks’ belief, headhunting was associated with fertility and economic growth for they believed in the magical powers of fertility emanating from the human head (Yanang 1986:8-10).

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92 Based on oral history interview with the village historian, Penjun Shakkam on October 19th, 2011.
93 For the origin of headhunting among the Konyaks, refer to Chingang’s The Konyak Naga: Yesterday and Today (2008:30-32).
Moreover, according to their beliefs, headhunting had social, political as well as religious significance. Headhunting was a part and parcel of Konyak social life. However, headhunting raids were never an individual affair rather it involved the best and fittest youth from the village. They would go for headhunting raids in group and if succeeded, they carried their slain bodies which they called as war trophies in group. They also danced and sang in group with the entire village celebrating their success. Social prestige and status depended on the number of heads a person beheaded. The person who could bring the highest number of heads was regarded as the bravest of all (Chingang 2008:31).

Politically, headhunting is believed to be have its significance because in such raids the defeated village(s) become the subject(s) of the victorious village and therefore had to pay tributes which they called *poon*. Thus headhunting was an important strategy for expansion of territory and jurisdiction. The religious significance of headhunting raids can be explained by the practice of human sacrifices during the dedication of a new *baan* (bachelor’s hall), *ghüm* (log drum) and a new village. It was believed that human sacrifices especially from other villages bring forth good luck and prosperity to the receiving village.

Thus these were the motivations behind the headhunting practices. However we may also say that the desire to avenge the lost of one’s own villager by killing and capturing the enemies’ heads could also be responsible for the perpetuation and continuity of such practice among the Konyak Naga villages and Nagas in the past.
5.3. 4. Festivals

The Konyaks lived a merry and festive life in the past which in some ways continue even today. As described by Chingang (2008:40), the Konyaks celebrated at least seven festivals in a year, corresponding to the agricultural seasons and operations. During these festivals, the devotees seek for bountiful harvest and also offer thanks to the Kahwang for the same. Some of the important festivals among the Konyaks are Aoleng, Lenghamo and Aonye.

Aoleng is the most important festival of the Konyaks which marks the beginning of a new year. This festival is celebrated during the last week of March to the beginning of April every year which lasts for a week. This festival is characterised by community social work such as clearing of foot paths and construction of watch tower near the morungs. There are other community works such as collection of vegetable, bamboo vessels, leaves, and hunting and fishing which are mostly done on the first and the second day. On the third day, the priest performs the rites and rituals which involved sacrifices of animals. Subsequently, the people engaged themselves in singing folk songs, performing folk dances and feasting. Boys and girls of the same age would gather in the respective morungs and ywos. During this festival, it is taboo for the villagers to go to their fields and thus villagers spend most of their time feasting and celebrating. This binds each villager to take part in their community feasts and festivals. This reflects the strong community life of the Konyaks in the past.

The next prominent festival is Lenghamo which is celebrated when the paddy and other vegetable begin to sprout. This festival comes after the Aoleng festival. The peculiarity of this festival is that it is usually celebrated in the fields by the respective families. The head of the family plays the role of the priest and performs the rituals for
the festival and asks for Kahwang’s blessings on the family. While Lenghamo is celebrated to invoke God’s blessings, Aonye is a thanksgiving festival where people offer thanks and gratitude for the blessings bestowed on them by Kahwang. This festival falls between the mid August and end September and is observed for three days with feasting, dancing and singing.

Besides these festivals, there are other festivals which are celebrated among the Konyaks. In Longwa village, festivals are known as Mo Pangpo and people observe different pangpo in a year. These include Gamring or Ganling Pangpo, Laoren Pangpo, Shahawin Pangpo, Pongyin Pangpo and Ghumrak Pangpo. Gamring or Ganling is a festival where the priest would offer sacrifices and perform rituals to ward off sickness in the village. Laoren is a footpath cleaning festival where all the villagers take part in clearing the paths leading to jhum fields, reserved forest and village roads. The post-harvest festival called Shahawin Pangpo is celebrated after the harvested paddy is brought to the village. Ponying Pangpo is celebrated when the chief Ahng is coroneted and Ghumrak Pangpo is celebrated whenever a new log drum is being brought to the morung. Thus, we may say that all these festivals have close associations with their life worlds and activities.

5.3.5. Funeral

Among the Nagas, the Konyaks had a very peculiar method of disposing the dead bodies. Till the advent of Christianity, the Konyaks were unaware of the burial system. The Konyaks’ method of disposal of death was neither underground burial nor crematory. Rather they kept the dead bodies on a bamboo platform for several days until it decomposed. Subsequently, the head was separated from the decomposed body
and the skull would be brought home which would be thoroughly cleaned with leaves and chaff. After this, the skull would be kept in a sandstone urn specially designed for the skull. The sandstone urn is then kept in the house where the family members would provide food to the death person. This was followed by a great feast in honour of the deceased (Chingang 2008:65-67).

In the second stage, the skull kept in the sandstone urn is taken to another place where it is covered with flat stones and buried. In this site, the belongings and weapons of the deceased which they believed could be useful on their way to Yimching are kept. As rightly pointed by Yanang (1986:23), this system of disposal of dead bodies among the Konyaks is closely associated with their belief in supernatural power of the human skull and immortality of the soul or the concept of life after death.

In the past, whenever there is a death in the village, the morung boys would convey the message to the whole village by beating the log drums as per the funeral tune. Subsequently, the villagers would visit the deceased’s house and pay respect to him/her. The visitors would bring along with them funerary gifts such as rice and betel nut. On such days, all the villagers abstained from going to fields. Clansmen and women helped in the preparation for the funeral rites. Usually, the funeral rituals are performed by the priest or the oldest man of the clan of the deceased only after the sunset.

Though the Konyaks had these unique cultural practices and peculiar beliefs, these have gone through tremendous change with the advent of the British in the Naga Hills followed by the introduction of Christianity, western education and western

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94 The funeral tune of the log drum conveys about the death in the village. This is because there are different tunes for different occasion such as war, fire, marriage, death, etc.
95 Konyaks are fond of chewing betel nut.
system of governance. Rapid change took place in the post independence era especially after the statehood of Nagaland. The impacts of these forces will be discussed in the following discussion.

5.4. Advent of Christianity among the Konyaks

The Konyaks are one of the earliest Naga tribes to encounter with the American Christian missionaries. The first Christian missionary to enter the land of the Konyak Nagas was Miles Bronson, who along with his family members reached Namsang village on 14th March 1840. This village is located in the southeast of Jaipur in Arunachal Pradesh near Naharkotia in Assam. Formerly, the people of this village were known as the Namsangia Konyaks. When the Bronsons arrived in Namsang, they were well received by the village Ahng. They were given a house to stay as well as a site to open a school (Yanang 1986: 28). In the later part of 1840, Mrs Bronson wrote the first reader in Konyak Naga language namely Natahema Heram Kabanva Nyapran. Despite the good beginning, the Bronsonites could not stay at Namsang for long due to Miles’ sister Rhoda Bronson’s sickness. As there was no hospital in Namsang village, they took her back to Jaipur for hospitalization. However, she died on 8th December, 1840. After this ill-fated death of Rhoda, the Bronsons could not go back to Namsang to continue their mission and therefore they remained at Sibsagar. In Sibsagar, Miles Bronson baptised the first Naga Christian convert by the name Hubi Konyak. But, Hubi did not live long to carry on the missionary work.

Later in the year 1855, two Konyak men were baptised by Miles Bronson. They are Aklong Konyak and Amlai Konyak of Namsang (Yanang 1986:29). They returned to their village and preached the gospel but they were stopped and killed by the villagers.
This may be because of the fact that during those days almost all the Nagas followed their own traditional religion fervently and stood firm to oppose Christianity. Thus in this way the earliest missionary work among the Konyak Nagas failed to produce strong Christians and a permanent church.

The next missionary who came into contact with the Konyaks was Dr. E.W. Clark. Clark was the earliest American missionary to work among the Ao Nagas. This was almost after 40 years since the Bronsons had left Namsang village. In February 1881, Dr. E.W. Clark along with some Ao Nagas from Molung and Merangkong villages visited Tamlu village. It is believed that the purpose of this visit was to reconcile between the two feuding villages namely Tamlu and Merangkong. But besides the reconciliation efforts, Dr. Clark could not make any substantial evangelistic works.

In 1920, a medical missionary, Dr. Bailey and Rev. Supongwati visited a few Konyak villages such as Tamlu, Wanching and Kongan. However, they were prohibited from further tour into the Konyak land (Walim 2005: 15). Thus, even this evangelistic attempt also failed to produce any fruit. After a gap of nine years, a man called Imkongmanyang came to Tamlu village for construction of a government post office. He was an Ao Naga from Akhoia village (Yanang 1986: 32). In Tamlu village he met a young boy by the name Longna, whom he took for schooling in his village. After the completion of sixth standard, Longna was sent to Impur Mission Centre for further studies. In due course of time, he was converted and baptised by Wickstrand on December 11, 1932 (Chingang 2007:139). He is considered as the first convert among the Konyak Nagas, though Hubi was the first to be baptised. Longna, being a very enthusiastic Christian, convinced some of his friends to the missionaries. They were
Henkong, Tongmet and Metna. Following this, they were convinced, converted and baptised by Rev. Wickstrands at Impur in 1933.

After a gap of a few years, Rev. Supongwati and Mr. Longri visited Tamlu village. Subsequently, six persons were baptised and this led to the establishment of the first church in Tamlu village in 1935. This was followed by the Kangching church which was established in 1946 following the visit of gospel team from Tamlu village. Slowly, the number of Konyak churches increased. The first Konyak Christian Mission Centre was opened at Wanching in 1947 and was supervised by the Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang (ABAM) from 1933 to 1950.

In 1950, the Council of Baptist Churches in Assam (CBCA) decided to take up the Konyak mission field and appointed Rev. Longritangchet as the first missionary to the Konyak Nagas on the 1st November, 1950. Rev. Longri was the son of Lanumentong from Changki village. He belonged to Ao Naga tribe. He worked among the Konyaks for more than 27 years and played a very influential role in evangelising the Konyaks. He was referred to as the “catalyst of a dynamic Konyak church” (Yanang 1986:38). Being a Naga, he understood the social structure of the Naga society and made use of the morungs or baans as the centres of his evangelistic mission. Under his leadership, the Konyak churches grew from ten to sixty nine churches. He also pioneered in establishing the Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Banjum (KBBB) which was formed on 10th December 1951. Besides this, he initiated the establishment of the vernacular Bible School at Wakching in 1957 and also in translation of Konyak Bible and hymnal (Walim 2005:19). These initiatives not only spread the Gospel of Christ but also unified the Konyaks who speak diverse dialects.

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96 For details on the works of Rev. Longri, refer to Longri Ao: A Biography.
97 Morung or Baan is a men’s dormitory.

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Along with him, his wife Mrs. Subokyimla also played a very important role especially among the Konyak women. She was the main force behind the establishment of the Konyak Baptist Sheko Banjum. She taught at the Bible School and also encouraged women to maintain cleanliness and to take care of their house.

After his retirement, there were several Konyak Christian leaders who led the Konyak Christians. At present, the Konyak Mission Centre is located at Mon. The KBBB has a well organised structure with the executive council as the apex body. It has several departments such as the women department, youth department, educational department, etc. These departments have made tremendous impact on their respective areas as well as on the whole Konyak society. The church can be considered as one of the strongest factors of change among the Konyaks.⁹⁸

5.5. Historical Background of Longwa Baptist Church⁹⁹

Before the advent of Christianity in Longwa village, some youth from this village had gone to other villages for pursuing education. In pursuit of their education in other Christianised Konyak and Ao Naga villages, they were introduced to the principles of Christianity, and later on, they were converted from traditional religion and baptised. This shows the close association of education and Christianity among the Nagas. Some of the earliest Christians from this village were Hongching, Gawang, Wangtem, Wangkang, Manngam and K. Konngam.¹⁰⁰ On hearing of their conversion to an alien religion, the villagers prohibited the Christianised youth from entering the village.

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⁹⁸ The impacts of church on Konyak society and Longwa village would be discussed in the next section.
⁹⁹ The historical background of Longwa Baptist Church is mostly from *Longwa Baptist Church Silver Jubilee: History 1978-2003*, published by Longwa Baptist Church, Mon, Nagaland, 2003. This was translated by Nahlak Shakham, the President of Longwa Students' Union.
Despite their zeal to spread Christianity, these youth could not preach the gospel in their village due to strong opposition from the village elders.

Subsequently, there were several attempts made to introduce Christianity but most of these failed except during the later part. Some prominent attempts to spread Christianity in this village are cited below. In 1964, Wangtem and Honching brought some Konyak students to the village and preached the gospel at the *Ahng Gho* i.e. the king’s court, where village elders and representatives of the various *morungs* assembled. This can be considered as the first attempt to spread the gospel of Christianity in this village. Following the first initiative, two youth from this village, namely Hongching and Gawang, were sent to an Ao village called Molungkimong village for education. Molungkimong was the earliest Ao Naga village to be Christianised. Subsequently, they were baptised in 1968 at Molungkimong village and became the first baptised Christians from Longwa village.

While the youth from this village have witnessed and accepted the principles of Christianity from other villages, the KBBB under different Reverends and evangelists visited Longwa village to preach the gospel. The earliest Christian missionary to Longwa was Rev. Mankap, who was working with the KBBB. He visited Longwa village in 1967 and discussed with Tawang, the then *Dobashi* (DB) about the gospel of Christ. This is probably because the DBs had much influence over the villagers since they act as liaisons between the villagers and the government. But unfortunately, Tawang expired in 1973 leaving this visit a futile one.

In the meantime in 1969, the Block Development Officer (BDO) of Mon, Yimna Ao visited this village. He met with the village elders and discussed about the acceptance of Christianity but no one responded positively. In the same year, a school
teacher from Government High School, Wakching, by the name Ezekiel Madras visited the village with four students namely Toshi Ao, Yanger Ao, Nyakpa Konyak and Chingkap Phom. This group visited Longwa with Konngam (the former MLA) and Manjei. This gospel group had a meeting with the Ahng and other village elders and preached the gospel of Christianity. But even this time, the Ahng and the elders rejected the proposal. Following the failed attempt to convince the elders, the group approached the students the next day where the students responded positively. They taught the students Christian songs as well as a prayer. After having fellowship and prayer with the students, the group returned to Wakching.

In 1971, a KBBB evangelist, Yanger, came to Longwa and preached the gospel. However, even this time, the Ahng and his council rejected the gospel of Christianity. This was possibly due to villagers' strict adherence to the traditional practices and beliefs. Moreover, Longwa being a chiefly village considered herself as the upholder of traditional and cultural practices.

Following this, another KBBB evangelist, Manao, also visited the village in the same year and preached the gospel but could not bring forth any fruitful result. Thus, the opposition from the Ahng and his court prevented any other individual in the village to accept Christianity with the exception of the students.

In 1975, Arsenba from the KBBB came to Longwa village with Hongching and Konngam and met the Ahng and elders. Like the earlier attempts, they also tried to convince the Ahng and his council to accept Christianity and convert from the traditional religion. In this meeting, two persons responded that they would observe how Christians lived their lives. They were Aluh, the Deputy Ahng, and Taihwang. Thus this shows a slow change in the stance of the village elders from that of a stiff...
opposition to allowing outsiders to preach gospels and response to observe the practice of Christianity.

Subsequent to the initiatives from the KBBB, many other Konyak churches also tried to preach the gospel to the Longwa villagers. This is because by then most of the Konyak villages have accepted Christianity. Some of these churches were Shahnyu Baptist Church, Kongan Baptist Church, and Sheanghah Wangsa Baptist church. However, they were prevented from coming to the village except the visit of Kongan Baptist Church in 1978.

In 1978, the Kongan Baptist Church, Women Department visited Longwa village under the leadership of the pastor, Pangwang. On 24th February 1978, the team had a meeting with the Ahng and his council and tried to convince them to accept Christianity. This meeting turned out to be the most successful and remarkable in the history of Longwa Christians as some village elders had agreed to accept Christianity. These were Geochah (Village Guard Commander), Hongngi (Goanbura) and Tonphah (Goanbura). Since they occupied prominent positions in the society, their conversion to Christianity was not opposed by any one. Following the acceptance of Christianity, they also agreed to be baptised on the 19th April, 1978. Based on the agreement between the early converts of Longwa and the Kongan Baptist Church Women Department, Pastor Pangwang returned to Longwa village on the 18th April, 1978. On 19th April 1978, seventy four persons from this village were baptised at the stream called Ashum.101 Thus these were the earliest baptised members of Longwa Baptist Church apart from those who had been baptised from other churches outside the village.

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101 The names of the earliest baptized members are given in Longwa Baptist Silver Jubilee History.
As Christianity made its entry in the village, the villagers, especially the Christian converts had the initial gatherings at Wanglang’s house which they called it *Arogo*. Since they did not have a separate church building, they felt the need to construct one. As a result, they had discussions and finally approached the chief *Ahng* and his council for a plot of land. This is because of the fact that all the village lands are under the possession of the chief *Ahng* and his council. Though a non-Christian, the chief *Ahng* agreed to give a plot of land near his palace for the construction of the church building. The villagers, especially the prominent and resourceful persons contributed money, food and materials for the construction. Moreover, various groups such as women department, students’ union, youth, etc., also contributed generously for the building construction. The first church building was made with palm leaves and bamboos.

With the passage of time, there was a mass conversion in this village specifically in 1984. As mentioned earlier, mass conversion was a common phenomenon among the Konyak Nagas where almost the entire village accepted Christianity without having any personal conviction of the Christian principles. This holds true even in this village. Witnessing the chief *Ahng* and village elders accepting Christianity, many villagers also left their old traditional religion and turned to Christianity. This is how Christianity was introduced in this village.

With Christianity nearing twenty five years, the villagers felt the need to construct a concrete church building. As a result, the church building committee was set up and the church foundation was laid on the 11th of April, 2001. After laying the church foundation, the construction started with the donations and contributions from

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102 *Arogo* is an Ao word meaning gathering or church which is also used by the Konyaks in the beginning of their conversion. This shows the influence of the Aos on the Konyaks.
individuals, *morungs*, students’ union, women group and youth. Moreover, the village council decided to use the Development Provident Fund for the construction of the church building. The construction of church building was completed in 2003 ahead of the Silver Jubilee celebration. Today, a big church building stands in the middle of the village near the village playground. At present, there are 1130 baptised church members and around 3787 general members. All Christian believers are Baptist Christians and no other denomination exists in this village. The Longwa Baptist Church is affiliated to the Konyak Baptist Bumeinok Banjum (KBBB) which is the apex body of Konyak churches which is affiliated to the Nagaland Baptist Council of Churches (NBCC).

5.6. Organisation of Longwa Baptist Church

The Longwa Baptist Church is a well organised church having different units, performing different functions pertaining to different sections of people in the church. The deacon board is the highest office and is responsible for the overall administration of the church. This board comprises of the pastor and other deacons in the church. The church also has different departments such as youth department, women department and Sunday school department. All these departments have their heads of department but function under the overall supervision of the deacon board. Besides these, the church has a secretary and a treasurer.

5.6.1. Deacon Board

The Deacon board is the highest body in Longwa Baptist Church. All the powers and functions of the church are vested on the Deacon board. There are eleven board members in Longwa Baptist Church comprising of the pastor and other members. The

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103 Based on interview conducted with the Longwa Baptist Church Pastor, Wanten Kano, on 21st October, 2011.
pastor is the board chairman and, therefore, he convenes and presides over the board meetings. The deacon board meets every Sunday after the Sunday worship service to discuss any issue concerning the church and takes all important decisions. It is responsible for making the annual church programme, annual budget and projects. The board is also responsible for overseeing and maintaining the code of conduct among the church members.

5.6.2. Pastor

The pastor occupies a key position in the Baptist churches. In Longwa Baptist Church, the pastor is held with high regard and respect. The present pastor of Longwa Baptist Church is Mr. Wanten Kano from Longpho village and has been serving as the pastor for the last 18 years. He is the overall in charge of the church. He gives sermons in the church services, teaches the gospel and looks after the spiritual well being of the church members. He also administers baptism, solemnizes engagement and marriage ceremonies and conducts funeral in the village. He undertakes home visitation programmes to each household and conducts family fellowship. He also visits the sick, the poor and needy. Whenever there is any dedication of house or achievements and parties, he attends such programmes on behalf of the church. He maintains close connection with the pastors of other churches and also the KBBB. He also acts as the official representative of the church in other activities and functions in the village. Whenever the pastor is out of station, he assigns another deacon to discharge his duties in his absence. However, this is limited to emergency situations like deaths or visits from other churches. The pastor is paid from the church fund with a monthly salary of Rs. 5000 and free accommodation.
Table 5.1
List of Longwa Baptist Church Pastors (1978- Till Date)\textsuperscript{104}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.No</th>
<th>Date/ Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23\textsuperscript{rd} April 1978-15\textsuperscript{th} Jan 1979</td>
<td>Mr. Chingi (Longwa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15\textsuperscript{th} Jan., 1979-21\textsuperscript{st} Jan 1986</td>
<td>Mr. Benshe Konyak (Tangnyu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15\textsuperscript{th} March 1986- 26\textsuperscript{th} June 1988</td>
<td>Lt. Mr. Nokphang Konyak (Longwa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24\textsuperscript{th} June 1988- 22\textsuperscript{nd} April 1989</td>
<td>Mr. Matpai (Longwa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>26\textsuperscript{th} April 1989- 3\textsuperscript{rd} Jan 1994</td>
<td>Mr. Sodi Konyak (T/Chingyu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd} January 1994- up to date</td>
<td>Mr. Wanten Kano (Longpho village)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source: Field Work Data}

The Table 5.1 shows that all the pastors of the Longwa Baptist church are male. Till date no women pastors in this church. This is also relevant in almost all Naga churches where women are denied of pastorship though there is separate department for women. Out of the six pastors, three are from other villages whereas three are from this village.

5.6.3. Youth Department

Like the other Konyak churches, the Longwa Baptist Church also has its youth department which is popularly called the Christian Youth Endeavour (CYE). The Longwa Bumeinok Youth Ukongwangpu started as Christian Endeavour Union in 1978. The main function of this department is to mentor the youth to develop Christian spirituality and to promote youth Christian ministry. All unmarried baptised members of

\textsuperscript{104} Longwa Baptist Silver Jubilee History, 2003.
the church are members of this department. This department has several executive members such as the youth president, the youth director, advisor, choir master, mission, secretary, etc. The first youth president was Mr. Ngamnyei and youth mission (treasurer) was Mr. Mangong. At present, the youth president is Mr. Aching Ahng, the youth director is Mr. Khamjai and Mr. Nokwang is the present choir master. There are different committees such as music committee, Bible committee, study committee, good news committee, evangelistic committee, social action committee, etc. The members of the youth department visit other churches as well as attend youth convention conducted by the KBBB in other villages. In 2011, the 57th KBBB youth convention was held at Longwa Baptist Church from 13th-16th October which was attended by more than 2000 delegates from Konyak churches in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.

5.6.4. Women Department

The women department is another important constituent of Longwa Baptist Church formed on 14th May, 1978 with Mr. Nyanyei as the first women leader. The first women leader was a man as there were no women ready to take up the responsibility. This shows the patriarchal set up of the society and inferior position of women in this village. This department caters to the welfare of the women, both spiritual and temporal. This department is comprised of 12 members headed by a woman leader. The present women leader of Longwa Baptist Church is Ms. Nahvik Taiwangs from Phomching. The main function of the department is to conduct women service, Bible studies, registering and naming of children during child birth, etc. They meet every Thursday morning and first day of the month for fellowship and prayer.
5.6.5. Sunday School Department

The children department is known as the Sunday school department in most Naga churches. This must have been influenced by the fact that in the earlier years of Christianity, new Naga converts were taught how to read and write on Sundays in the church since most of them go to the fields on weekdays. Even in Longwa Baptist church, the Sunday school department mentors children in Christian principles by conducting worship services, Bible classes and teaching songs. The department has a superintendent and four Sunday school teachers. This department has different sections such as first and second primary and first and second junior. This department also coordinates with the other departments in various activities of the church.

5.7. Annual Church Calendar and Activities

The Longwa Baptist church has its own annual calendar in consonance with the calendar of KBBB and NBCC. The church conducts Sunday morning and evening worship service every Sunday, organises revival camps, gospel tours, conducts leadership training and Sunday school teachers training, etc. Besides all these events, they also observe important Christian occasions such as New Year, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas, Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, Thanksgiving Sunday, fasting and prayer, etc. The church programme also includes water baptism, gospel tours and mission trips to other churches and organisations. It is pertinent to mention that the Longwa church has been extending its influence beyond the border. Being a border village, the church has visited a number of Konyak Naga villages in Myanmar both independently as well as under the aegis of the KBBB. The Eastern Mission was initiated as early as 1977 by the KBBB and many Konyaks in Myanmar have been
converted to Christianity as a result of their gospel tours. Today most of the Konyak Nagas in Myanmar have established churches in their villages as a result of the efforts of the KBBB.

5.8. Role of the Church in Longwa Village

In the post Christianised era, the church has emerged as one of the most important means of socialisation and social control among the Nagas. In fact, it is the biggest forum for imbibing the values and norms of the society. The church emphasizes on the spiritual life, good moral ethics, and responsibility to live in harmony with one another (Lohe 2011:151). In Longwa village the church plays an extensive role in the life of its members. In fact an individual’s association with the church starts from birth which continues throughout his/her life till death. Since the time a baby is born, he/she starts experiencing the influence of church by way of naming and registration of the baby which is done by the women department headed by the women leader. When the child starts speaking, he/she attends the Sunday school which is meant for children. In Sunday school children are taught about the principles of Christianity through Bible studies, stories and songs. Once baptised, the person becomes a full fledged member of the church. The youth are involved in various church activities such as singing in the church, ushering during the church service and maintain the cleanliness of the church compound.

Each member of the church is expected to attend the church services and take part in programmes of the church. Besides the Sunday services, they also attend their own departmental services, be it women, youth or children. They are also required to give a tenth tithe that is 10% of their income from salary, wage, business and paddy.
People also keep aside the amount from the money they get from selling vegetable, poultry, pigs, etc. Apart from the tithes, they also give offerings during the services, annual membership fees, thanksgiving contributions and donations. Members of the church are also expected to attend any fund raising programmes organised by the church. All these constitute the main income of the church. From the income mentioned above, the church pays the salary of the pastor, women leader and other important church dignitaries. The Longwa Baptist church also pays its annual membership fees to the KBBB. From the remaining amount they organised various church activities and programmes, relief measures for the poor and needy, guest speakers, journey allowances and stationary.

The church exercises control over its members not only in religious sphere but also in all aspects of life. The church follows the Baptist Christian principles and doctrines. Based on these principles, the church has certain rules and regulations which every member must abide by. For instance, the church upholds holy marriage among its members. If a couple has a child out of wedlock, both their names are struck off the church’s register and ex-communicated or deregistered. Even if a married person commits adultery, he/she is liable for excommunication from the church. The church is firmly established on the tenets and principles of Baptist Christians and therefore whoever goes against the doctrinal basis is also excommunicated. Any person committing intentional murder is also excommunicated from the church.

Whenever a person commits these breaches, the person’s name and the reason for excommunication is announced in the church. Henceforth, the name is struck off from the church register and thus excommunicated from the church. However, excommunication does not mean that the person is forbidden to attend church services.
The excommunicated person can still attend all the services but he cannot take part in the proceedings of the church. After a gap of a few months, the person concerned can confess before the church and the later has to decide whether to accept his/her confession or apology. If accepted, the person’s name will be re-entered in the register. Within such interval period between the ex-communication and re-registering, if any person dies, the church does not perform the Christian funerary programme meant for a full fledged membership. In this way, the church controls and regulates the behaviour of the people from birth, marriage and even death.

Since excommunication is a shame for the members, every member tries to abide by the principles though there are still some who breach the principles. It was told that in the early years of Christianity, there were a few persons from this village who were excommunicated for adultery time and again, since the Konyaks followed polygyny before the coming of Christianity. Some were found to practice polygyny even today. Besides polygyny, the church also discourages some of its members addicted to opium, alcohol and betel nut and exhorts them to discontinue such intoxicants. The church also bans the sale of alcohol in the village. However, there are people who are still addicted to opium and who sell alcohol clandestinely.

5.9. Impacts of Christianity and Modernity on the Longwa Konyaks

Similar to all the Naga villages, the introduction of Christianity in Longwa village has brought about a tremendous change among the Longwa villagers. Christianity is the chief factor of change whether it is social, economic, political, cultural or religious among the Nagas in general and Longwa in particular. Christianity introduced in this village through a small group of people made a slow yet gradual change in the hearts
and the minds of the people which finally led to transformation of the entire village.

Some of the impacts of Christianity among the Longwa villagers are discussed below:

5.9.1. Decline of Traditional Konyak Religion

As discussed in the previous section on the traditional Konyak religion, we find that this primitive religion had a strong control over its follower for centuries. Initially the early converts were opposed, ostracised and ex-communicated from the village for going against such status quo of religion. However, with the entry of Christianity in this village, the tight grip of traditional religion began to lose its hold. As compared to the old religion which was cumbered with numerous taboos, rites and rituals and sacrifices, people found Christianity to be simpler and easy to follow. Following the mass conversion of 1984, there was a sudden decline of the old religion which at present is at the verge of extinction.

5.9.2. Modern Education

Unlike many Naga villages where Christianity preceded modern education, in Longwa village modern education preceded Christianity. As discussed in Chapter two, the Government Primary School (GPS) was established in this village in the year 1971, which is seven years before the formal entry of Christianity. However, with the introduction of Christianity, many illiterate villagers began to realise the value of education. As in other villages, the students and teachers of the GPS played a very important role in the introduction of Christianity and in bringing about reforms in the village. Christianity and modern education acted as the greatest partners of change among the Longwa Konyaks.
5.9.3. Fading of Po or Morung

Having seen the benefits and value of modern education, parents started sending their children and wards to Christianised Konyak and Ao Naga villages for higher education. As such there was exodus of village children to other relatively advanced villages. Moreover, with the declining of the old traditional religion and headhunting practice, the po or morungs began to lose its position as the centre of social life among the villagers. In fact, morung was replaced by schools and the church. The church, in order to accommodate the youth into its fold, introduced rooms for the youth under the supervision of the church elders. The rites and rituals which were observed in the morungs were looked upon as heathen or evil practices. As such, the pos began to fade from the daily lives of the villagers as well as from their memories.

5.9.4. Declining power of the Ahng

The decline of the Ahng's power is not the direct impact of Christianity, but the result of the introduction of modern political institutions such as Gaonbura, Dobashi and Village Council and other administrative offices. However, we can say that Christianity in some ways was responsible for the declining of Ahng's power. Unlike the old primitive religion, Christianity preaches love, brotherhood, forgiveness and equality among its followers. This somehow gradually changed the attitude of the Ahng and his subjects. In the past, the Ahngs were authoritarian and their words are considered final and binding. Anyone who trespassed or violated such laws was given death penalty or severe punishment. As a result, the Ahng is feared and obeyed by all. It was told that no one dared to look straight at the Ahng or bypassed him. Such was the power and status of
the Ahng. But with Christianity, the Ahng also learnt to be compassionate and loving to his subjects. Along with the introduction of modern political institutions, this gradually led to the decline of his power.

5.9.5. Prohibition of Headhunting Practices

In the pre-British and pre-Christianised era, headhunting was considered as the symbol of prestige and valor among the Nagas. As discussed in the previous section on the Konyak culture, we learnt that the Konyaks were proud and ‘brave’ head-hunters. They practiced headhunting for several reasons which were social, political, economic and religious in nature. However, with the entry of the British in the Naga Hills, headhunting was banned and villages involved in such practices were punished severely by imposing huge fines, ravaged and burnt. As a result, headhunting practices stopped in the 1950s. Though the government through its various agencies and policies could stop the headhunting practices to a considerable extent, it is also true that Christianity played an important role in curbing this menace. Christianity, through its principles, could convince people that murder is a sin and, therefore, anyone committing murder would face the wrath of God (Exodus 20:13). Besides this, the Christian missionaries and church workers taught people how to reconcile and forgive one another.

5.9.6. End of Tattoo Culture\(^{105}\)

The tattoo culture among the Konyaks has strong connection with the traditional religion and therefore with the headhunting practice. However, with the introduction of Christianity, tattoo was discouraged and in some villages it has been banned. As per the

\(^{105}\) Based on oral history interview with the village historian, Penjun (22/10/2011).
Christian principles, tattoo is considered as sinful as mentioned in the book of Leviticus 19:28 (Holy Bible New International Version 2011:107) which prohibits people to cut/mutilate their bodies and put tattoo marks. Therefore, the missionaries and church leaders encouraged the people to give up such practices. Moreover, with the banning of headhunting practices, tattooing failed to get any motivation. As discussed in the previous section on tattoo, the last batch of age grade to be tattooed was in 1974 where the young boys enacted the headhunting raids by attacking the wooden effigies. The village historian, Penjun and his batchmates were the last tattooed head-hunters in this village.

5.9.7. Traditional Marriage System

In the past, marriage ceremonies were performed by the village priest. But with the advent of Christianity, the traditional priest has been pushed to the backseat. All marriages are to be solemnised by the church pastor or other church leaders. Marriages are conducted following the Christian norms. The bride and the groom would take the Christian vow to love and cherish one another till death. Cases of pre-marital pregnancy or pregnancy out of wedlock, extra-marital affairs and polygyny are denounced as sinful and immoral. Those found practicing such activities are ex-communicated by the church and their membership struck off from the church register. Such ex-communicated persons are to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness after an interval of time.
5.9.8. Decreasing of Polygyny

In Chapter Two, we have already discussed the prevalence of polygyny among the Konyaks and also of Longwa Ahngs and how Christianity had impacted the mindset of the people towards polygyny. We find that with the acceptance of Christianity, this practice was reduced to a considerable extent. For instance, Ahng Phawang had 60 wives (one queen and 59 wives from commoner clans), the present chief Ahng married 7 wives (one queen and 6 secondary wives) and the prince, Phawang Laipa (Tonyai) the heir to throne married only two wives (one queen and a secondary wife). From our analysis, we may deduce that Christianity was and is largely responsible for the decreasing of polygyny in this village. The main reason lies in the fact that Christianity upholds monogamous marriage (Exodus 20:14) and (Hebrews 13:4) among its followers and the church being the strongest agent of Christianity exerts control on its members to abstain from such practices either through preaching, indoctrination or excommunication.

5.9.9. Change in the Burial System

Prior to the advent Christianity, the Konyaks followed a peculiar type of disposing of dead bodies by keeping on the bamboo platforms as discussed on the previous section on culture. But with the introduction of Christianity, there was a change even in the burial system of the Longwa Konyaks as with the other villages. As taught by the missionaries and church workers, they learnt to bury the dead bodies beneath the ground. The funeral rites and rituals which were performed by the traditional priest are now replaced by Christian rites performed by the pastor of the church. The old chanting was replaced by reading of the Bible and Christian funeral songs. The church along with
the students' union taught the ill effects of the old burial system, especially in spreading of diseases. In this way, the Christianity brought about transformation in the burial system which ultimately introduced a hygienic and clean living among these villagers.

5.9.10. Hygienic Living

During the early part of 20th century, most of the Naga villages were found to be in want of hygienic and sanitation facilities. People were least concerned about their sanitary practices. Similarly people in Longwa village were not aware about the importance of clean and hygienic sanitary practices. The villagers lived together with their domestic animals in the same house (it was found even during the field work in some houses). As recalled by the Longwa Students' Union President, Mr. Nahlak there was a time when very few toilets existed in the village and the domestic animals roamed about freely scavenging on these wastes. There was open defecation and as such no proper place for disposing of human excreta and waste. Rather the pigs often survived on this human waste. The church along with the students played a very important role in teaching and training the villagers about sanitation and hygienic life. In order to promote clean environment, the students instructed the villagers to construct toilets and also sty for pigs and other animals. If pigs are found roaming out of the sty, they were killed immediately. In this way, the villagers learnt the lesson of good and hygienic living though there are still few houses that lack the basic sanitary condition.

5.9.11. Decreasing Opium Addiction

Though the Naga tribes had inherited several common legacies from the British, the Konyaks in particular had inherited the opium legacy from the British. As per the
traditions, opium or *kani* was known to the Konyaks even prior to the advent of British. However, their knowledge was limited only to its use as a medicinal plant and not as an intoxicated plant. The British seeing the intelligence of the Konyaks, especially the art of gun making among the Konyaks, planned to intoxicate them with opium. Subsequently, the British established Opium *Mahal* at Wakching with the aim to retard the intelligent Konyaks and also to tamed this ‘stubborn’ tribe (Mon Town Souvenir 2001:37). Though these cannot be ignored, one needs to realise that the revenue interest of the British was responsible for such policy. Besides providing opium at the *Mahal*, they also taught the Konyaks how to cultivate opium.

Along with many Konyak villages, Longwa also fallen victim to the vices of opium. Many villagers succumbed to opium addiction which affected their mental, physical, economic and social life. The church along with the students’ union played a very important role in discouraging opium addiction in the village. They discuss with the addicts regarding the ill effects of opium on human health, economy and society. Though there are still some people, especially the older folks, who are addicted to opium, the number have considerably decreased.

From the above discussion, we may say that Christianity as a factor of change among the Longwa Konyaks has impacted every aspect of their lives. Their material culture and non-material culture, habits and way of life, their relationship with one another and with other villages and their world view have been transformed through and through. In the process of this fast changing pattern, most of their traditional practices and customs have been lost and forgotten. However, we also find the traces of their

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106 The researcher has witnessed the whole process of opium preparation among the old folks during the field work. It is a tedious process of more than two hours of preparation. But this has become a means of socialisation among the old folks in the village.
traditional practices in new or modern forms. Thus, there is modernisation of traditional practices in some aspects of their life as propagated by M.N. Srinivas in his book *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*.

5.10. Dualism between Christianity and Traditional Beliefs and Practices

Though Christianity was introduced in this village since the late 1970s, majority of the people converted only after 1984 following the mass conversion. As a result of mass conversion, many people did not experience personal conviction and personal relationship with Jesus Christ which resulted into backsliding as well as breached of Christian principles. For some people, even after their conversion to Christianity, they still carry on some traditional practices and beliefs and observe taboos. In fact, the dualism of Christian principles and traditional practices and beliefs are manifested in various aspects of life. Some of these are discussed below:

5.10.1. Festivals

Though there has been tremendous change in the feasts and festivals especially with the advent of Christianity and other forces of modernity, there are some traditional festivals which are still observed by the people. Along with Christian celebrations such as Christmas, New Year, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Thanksgiving Day, Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day, the villagers continue to observe their traditional festivals such as Aoleng, Lenghamo, Gamring or Ganling Pangpo, Laoren Pangpo, Shahawin Pangpo, Pongyin Pangpo and Ghumrak Pangpo. In some cases, they combined the Christian celebrations with their traditional festivals. Moreover due to identity assertion among
the people, there is resurgence or revival of traditional customs and practices among the Longwa Konyaks.

5.10.2. Marriage

As discussed earlier, marriage in this village has gone through a remarkable change with the advent of Christianity. But traditional practices such as clan exogamy, exchange of gifts between the affines, marriage rules especially for the Ahng, etc., have remained unchanged. Despite the changes, people still observed these norms zealously.

5.10.3. Burial System

The dualism of Christianity and traditional practices is evident even in the burial system. Today most of the villagers bury the deaths in their respective morung cemeteries. Some graves and memory stones are also found near the residential house and foot path. But the old practice of keeping the personal belongings of the deceased still continues. During the field work the researcher found some personal belongings such as gun, cloths, bags, plates, cups, etc., hung on the grave. This confirms the continuity of the Konyak traditional beliefs in the immortality of souls which they believe the dead persons would use in their next life.

5.10.4. Seers

Seers occupied a very prominent place in the pre-Christianised society. They are believed to heal diseases, predict future and even communicate with the deaths and spirits. Even today, Longwa still has a village seer who is an old man as mentioned
before. Despite accepting Christianity, people are found consulting the seer on several matters.

Thus we can say that though there has been tremendous change in the lives of the people, there are still some aspects of tradition which are found even today. The continuity of traditional practices amidst constant changing society testifies the link between change and continuity among the tribals.

5.11. Summary

This chapter analyses various aspects of the Konyak traditional cultural norms and religious beliefs as found in this border village. Traditional beliefs such as the concept of God and spirits, concept of life after death, taboo, lycanthropy, etc., have been discussed based on oral narratives and secondary sources. The advent of Christianity among the Konyaks and particularly in Longwa has been traced through the church records and personal interviews. Following the introduction of Christianity, Longwa Baptist Church was established. The church continues to play a very influential role in regulating the lives of the people. The impacts of Christianity on the lives of the people have been comprehensively dealt with in this chapter.

In this chapter we also found that culture and religious practices in this borderland transcend over politico-legal borders. In other words, there exists a common cultural space along this borderland. For instance, people from both sides of the border observe and participate in the festivals and marriages. They also visit one another during funerals. Moreover, the Konyaks on the Indian side initiated the evangelistic works among their people in Myanmar. Besides these, the Konyaks from Nagaland also conduct sanitation and health camps, educational tour and meetings amongst the
Konyaks in Myanmar. Thus we see the sharing of a common cultural space along this borderland.

This chapter ends with the observation on the continuity or religious dualism of the traditional culture and beliefs along with Christianity among the Longwa people. Though Christianity and other forces of modernity have brought tremendous change to the life patterns of these borderlanders, we find the continuity of many traditional practices. Thus the study of the cultural practices and religious beliefs has indeed enriched our understanding on this borderland society.