Chapter Six

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DONYI-POLO & HERAKA MOVEMENTS

The Donyi-Polo and Heraka are the indigenous religious reform movement of North East India. It is a movement for the revitalization of the indigenous faith and culture. There is a realization among the elite and religious leaders to preserve their identity & culture and to organize their religion to meet the onslaught of their religion & culture from the dominant religions. In most of the indigenous movement around the globe, the right to self-determination, \(^1\) political autonomy, and control of natural resources forms an important aspect. However, forging of religious and cultural identity based on indigenous tradition forms an important aspect of the Donyi-Polo and Heraka movements. These movements are expressed in the formation of cultural and literary societies, recording of myths, legends or in other words, recovery of their past, traditions and history.

The Adis were the first to formalize the Donyi-Polo faith and propagated it through ‘Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang’. Among the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh, the revival of faith in Donyi-Polo, an indigenous religion practically began from the early part of 1990’s. The increasing trend of Christian converts among the people and the subsequent erosion of the indigenous customs and practices have created concern for the people who practiced indigenous religion. Indifferent attitude on the part of the people towards their aged-old culture and tradition thereby imminent possibility of losing it has also necessitated the urgency of reviving and promoting the indigenous system. Organizations such as Tani

\(^1\) The breaking of colonial ties involves the concept of ‘self-determination’, enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which is the right of peoples to organize their lives on their territories with little interference from outside. Indigenous peoples use self-determination to express their aim of controlling their political, cultural and economic resources.
Jagriti, Arunachal Pradesh Priests Association which was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh Nyobu Welfare Association and Nyishi Culture Society\(^2\) sprang up in these years whose main motive is to preserve and promote the indigenous customs and traditions of the community.

However, the formation of ‘Nyshi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society’ was a landmark, as this society became a formal forum for discussion of the indigenous religion in a broader perspective. Many of these organizations organize regular prayer meeting in fixed places like those of church and temple. Branches are established in many places, even in remote areas. This has brought a massive enthusiasm and response from across the sections of the society. In order to channelize the movement for preservation, promotion and propagation of indigenous belief system and culture throughout the state of Arunachal Pradesh, ‘Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh’ was formed in December 1999. This society is a conglomeration of all indigenous faiths and cultures. The basic aim of this society is to forge a united movement for cultural and religious revival among the people. For this purpose, this society organizes seminars, symposia, debates, public meetings, and mass gathering.

Similarly the Heraka movement or popularly known as the “Heraka Cult”\(^3\) is also socio-religious movement attempted for the preservation of their ‘indigenous’ religion and culture. The initial objective of the movement was to defend and preserve the indigenous religious beliefs of the Zeliangrong people against the Hindu neighbors and the advancing of Christianity which came in the wake of colonial administration. This socio-religious


reform was started by Haipou Jadonang, a Naga revolutionary and Rani Gaidinliu in the early twentieth century. Heraka is a reformed Zeliangrong religion which believes in the supreme God Tingwang, and does not believe in the worship of spirits or smaller deities. It believes in religious monotheism. This movement gained its momentum in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. The formation of Zeliangrong Heraka Association was a landmark as this organization became the apex body of the Heraka movement.

There are many similarities between Donyi-Polo and Heraka as religious conversion is concern. The lack of proper belief system, proper written text or creed is the main reason for the people for conversion to Christianity. The Christian religion with its proper written text and creeds made it simple for the missionaries to preach and interpret, which in turn made it simple for the people to understand and accept the Christian teaching. Besides, extending educational facilities, medical aid, and other benefits are the reason for conversion to Christianity among the Donyi-Polo and Heraka communities. Nevertheless, for some, conversion is a personal choice, and does not necessarily ascribe to educational facilities, medical aid or other benefits.

**The Hindutva Politics**

The founding idea of India was never simply a commitment to abstract values or ideas of pluralism and democracy but was rooted in a practical understanding of the compulsions and constraints of Indian politics. The emergence of a political Hinduism, of regional voices, and of the claims of caste identities, some of these last created by constitutional law, others worn as a defiant badge of historical oppression has given the

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question of ‘who is an Indian?’ a sometimes lethal vitality. Nehru’s idea of India sought to coordinate within the form of a modern state a variety of values: democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism. The unexpected historical trajectories of these various components since 1947 have changed the conditions of political competition in India, as well as the identity of the competitors, and as a result, it has become much more difficult to sustain a vision of a single political community.5

What it means to be a Hindu for the RSS is a larger question that is associated with cultural nationalism. For an RSS, ‘a person who had taken birth in India, who may follow any religion, caste, creed etc, any form of worship but who thinks that India is his motherland and holy land is a Hindu’. The RSS reiterated that they only try to cultivate and impart the sense of nationalism to everyone and do not force anybody to be a Hindu, and that the similar pattern of worship and activities of some tribals with Hinduism is not necessarily the influence and proselytization work of the RSS. But rather, this has been the influence of Hinduism before the advent of the RSS. For an instance, the Noctes are Vaishnavite Hindus.

Therefore, the presence of the right wing Hindu politics in the North East is a recent phenomenon. The important sign of Hindu influence is evident among the followers of Donyi-Polo. That there are postures and calendar with the Hindu gods and goddesses, and symbol of om in Donyi-Polo homes. In the words of Nabam, ‘some people have pointed out that the using of Dup Duna and utterances of om sound in the proceedings of Nyedar Namlo is purely a Hindu influence. In this way the inner value of the term indigenous or originality is being defeated even in the eye of a layman who does not embrace other

religion but wish to retain his own religion\textsuperscript{6}. However, their assertion is that anybody who goes to gangging (house of worship) is a follower of Donyi-Polo, and it has nothing to do with postures and symbols of Hindus gods and goddesses; while the Christians consider Donyi-Polo as Hindus. Many tribals are of the view that Hindus are helping them to protect and preserve their indigenous faith, culture and identity, so keeping postures of Hindu gods and goddesses is just another kind of respect in return for what they have done.

Similarly, there are Hindu symbols like \textit{om}, postures of Hindu gods and goddesses, Hindu calendar circulated by Hindu organizations in Heraka homes. For the Heraka it is a sign of brotherhood. Besides, some Heraka claim themselves as Hindus. Heraka argued that since we live in Hindustan, we call ourselves as Heraka Hindus, but the religion is different from Hinduism. They further argued that the Heraka are the Zeliangrong Hindus, and there are others like Bengali Hindus, and that they are different from each other. The Heraka even considers Christians as Hindustan Christians. In Heraka festivals, Hindus are invited, and often celebrate with the Hindus. In the same way Heraka also celebrate Hindu festivals like Holi, Diwali and others. Besides, in Heraka programmes and events, Hindus are invited. For an instance, in 2010, during the celebration of Heraka school silver jubilee in Tenning, Nagaland, many Hindu leaders and organizations participated in the celebration.

\textbf{Institutionalizing Place of Worship}

The primordial religions of the tribals do not have a proper place of worship. The reform movements establish a proper place of worship by constructing a house of worship. The house of worship is called the gangging in Donyi-Polo movement, and kelumki in

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Heraka movement. The Arunachal Vikas Parishad, which is under the RSS, is engaged in the construction of ganggings. In the construction of kelumki, donations and fundings often come from Hindu individuals and organizations. Thus, the Hindus extended their help in the construction of Donyi-Polo gangging and Heraka kelumki. In the words of Nabam, ‘the Hindu based organizations are being accused of having undue association with the indigenous organizations such as Donyi-Polo Mission, Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang, Arunachal Pradesh Nyobu Welfare Association, Indigenous Faith and Culture Society of Arunachal Pradesh, and Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Culture Society and thereby try to assimilate or induct some Hindu elements into the tribal religion. These organizations are charged to the extent of financially helping the indigenous organizations for their sheer vested interest’.7

The mode of worship and liturgical order are also similar between Donyi-Polo and Heraka. Before entering the ganging, shoes must be removed. Inside there are two sections, the left side for the male and the right side for the female. At the front of the ganging is the altar, centrally placed and elevated, reserved for two priests and a conductor. However, the conductor is changed every Saturday. The children sit with their parents according to their gender. The priests perform rituals and chantings, and then prayers are performed with the congregation. The priest sprinkles the holy water which is called bogum or engo karsing asi or guminsigo for purification. There is no blood sacrifice or rituals, but if a person commits sin, he or she comes to the ganging for purification through the holy water. It is a simplified form of worship and rituals.

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Similarly, before entering the compound of the Kelumki, shoes must be removed. Inside the kelumki, there are two sections. In contrary to the gangging, the right side is reserved for the male and the left side for the female. The devotees compulsorily offer sunrise prayer on every Full Moon day and the Heraka New Year Day at Kelumki. In the early morning, they gather at Kelumki and recite hymns and offer collective Sunrise Prayer. The Priest offers prayer to Tingwang. Then, they enter Kelumki in singing devotional song. Individual member also offers prayer at the holy Altar. They sing a rejoicing song in praise of Tingwang. On the Heraka New Year Day, they sing a devotional song followed by incantation of Heraka hymn and drink Telau dui\textsuperscript{8} (Holy water). The Heraka instead of sprinkling the holy water like in the Donyi-Polo gangging, drink as sacrament to cure or prevent sickness and to cleanse sins on the full moon day. Similar with the Donyi-Polo religion, the Heraka is also a simplified form of worship and rituals.

Every Heraka village has kelumki, but there are some Adi villages where there is no gangging. This is because the Donyi-Polo movement began only in 1986, while the Heraka movement was started in 1925. The kelumki is generally constructed at the highest point of the village while there is no such in the construction of gangging. In Heraka, majority of the people attend the kelumki, while only about 40\% of the people attend the Donyi-Polo gangging. The gangging is open every Saturday, while kelumki is open only during the full moon day. A ridin or thread is tied in the hand in Donyi-Polo gangging, but there is no tying of the thread in Heraka kelumki. The holy water is sprinkled for purification in Donyi-Polo but in Heraka the people drink the holy water to prevent or cure sickness.

\textsuperscript{8} For the Heraka, Telau dui is the holiest water which is available only in Bhubon Cave. The Heraka people use to collect Telau dui from Bhubon Cave every year.
Life in the Other World

There is a general conception of people all over the world that heaven and hell exists somewhere outside this world where the soul of the dead dwells. Heaven is good for good doers and hell for wrong doers. As per the philosophy of Rangfraism, any matter relating to life after death will remain eternally unknown because it lies across the eternal gap. Therefore, Rangfraism advocated that since it is a matter of belief, we cannot force others to believe in the same way we believe in.

However, most of the indigenous faiths believe in rebirth. They are of the opinion that whatever bliss or sins a man earns through his deeds during his life time, is accumulated with himself which after death, is being carried forward to his next birth due to the fact of which each individual has a distinct nature, own level of thinking and intellect. These deeds, good or bad, turn into his fate which he enjoys or suffers either during his life time or in the next life. Therefore, to have blissful life, one has to correct his fate and for a good fate, he has to correct his deeds. Virtuous deeds earns bliss and sinful deeds earns curse and accordingly, blissful rebirth-rebirth is the heaven for him, while the cursed-one a hell.

Heraka people believe in rebirth of human soul. Although, the living human body dies, its soul is not death since it comes from Tingwang (God). It is believed that all souls of righteousness and good doers will go to the Kingdom of God after death or born again to human life in a high ranking family according to the Judgment of the Supreme God and live in a notable life in this world. And ultimately, those who had done good deeds in all generation of his/her life in this world will certainly go to the Kingdom (Heaven) of God.
living eternally and liberation from all miserable life after death. But on the contrary, mankind of falsehood, evil doers, and sinners will be born again and again after death into the lower forms of destitute life as retribution and ultimately its soul would become extinct after like a dew drop falls and dried up.

However, different views, opinions and interpretations exist regarding life after death among the follower of Donyi-Polo religion. There is no clear concept of life after death as there are no written texts. Most of the followers of Donyi-Polo in villages and remote areas still believe in their own way of understanding, lacking a systematic interpretation. But the educated elites are still in the process of reforming the Donyi-Polo religion. This is because unlike Heraka, Donyi-Polo reform movement is not yet complete. Donyi-Polo does not believe in the recycle of birth, but believes its existence.

**Institution of Priesthood**

The priests are the most pious personalities who always offer prayers to God may be for himself or for others. So his thoughts and feelings are usually remaining pure in compared to others. The priest who performs the traditional rites and rituals in the indigenous religion don not generally maintains austerities. Except in some indigenous religion, the priest maintains strict austerities. For example, the priest who performs rituals in the temple of Rangraism who is called Tamwa observes complete austerities. In Donyi-Polo and Heraka, there are no strict austerities on the part of the priests.

Priesthood in Donyi-Polo is considered as divine providence. Therefore, priesthood is not hereditary. There are those who have healing power. It is a divine power a priest gets from his dream. In most cases, through massage the sick people are healed. Healing is one
way of bringing the people back to the Donyi-Polo faith. Different religious groups including Christians visit the priest for healing in time of sickness. Most people after their sickness is healed accepted the Donyi-Polo religion. There are also cases where Donyi-Polo believer converting to Christianity if they receive healing from Christian missionaries, and if the Donyi-Polo priests could not heal their sickness. Every Gangging has a priest and his assistance. Since the Donyi-Polo movement began only in the late 1980s, there are many places where Ganggings are yet to be established.

Similarly, priesthood in Heraka is not hereditary but depends on the quality of a person. There are criterions to become Tingkupeu such as humility, obedience, righteousness, love, holy, kindness, and faithful. Every Heraka village has one priest with one assistant. Since the Heraka movement began in the late 1920s, Kelumki are established in every Heraka village. However, in Heraka, Christians do not go to the Heraka priests for healing or other activities. There are instances where the Heraka people used to go to Christian missionaries for healing their sickness. In contrast to the Donyi-Polo priests, the Heraka priests hardly perform healing work. In the recent years the Heraka has adopted a healer called Herakandingpeu, whose task is to heal people from sickness. However, the work of Herakandingpeu is not as popular as in the case of Donyi-Polo priest. Most of the Heraka priests are engaged in ceremonial and liturgical services.

Sacralizing Space: Religious & Non-religious

Religion permeates all aspects of life in tribal societies. It is basically a community religion. To be truly human is to belong to the whole community, including the ancestors and creation. To do so involves the active participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals
and festivals of the community. In the tribal worldview, one cannot make a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life. There is a sense of cosmic oneness. In other words, all things are seen to fundamentally share the same nature and same interaction with each other-rocks and forest trees, beasts and serpents, the living, the dead and first ancestors are all one.

In the pre-reform era, the indigenous religions in most of the tribal societies do not distinguish between religious and non-religious. The dichotomy between the sacred and secular was not known or evident in most of the indigenous religions for long time. This is because in the pre-reform indigenous societies, culture, tradition and religion are identical. The increasingly noticeable demarcation between various spheres of life, or between sacred and secular is a recent phenomenon which is the by-product of the reform movement.

The Heraka in the recent years have adopted the Kelumki as sacred. By sacralizing this space, the Heraka makes the Kelumki the centre of the village, replacing the Paupaise Hezoa. Moreover, the Kelumki represents the sacredness of the Heraka around which a sacred community is continuously defined. The noticeable difference in the way people are seen either as religious or non-religious is evident in festivals and how the Paiki mediates between the two conceptions: the sacred Kelumki and the non-sacred. In the festivals, men can drink the traditional rice beer in the Paiki whereas this is prohibited in the

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9 The Hezoa is a mound of earth necessary to every Paupaise village. It was considered sacred only during ritual. It was being used as a jumping pit, in everyday life, whenever a ritual was not taking place, therefore, emphasizing the sacred as all encompassing yet fluctuating, rather than permanent and fixed in a particular place as in the Heraka Kelumki. See Longkumer, Arko, *Where Do I Belong? : Evolving Reform and Identity Amongst the Zeme Heraka of North Cachar Hills, Assam, India* (PhD Unpublished Thesis, Submitted to the Religious Studies Department, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, May 2008), p. 136.

10 Ibid, p. 144.
Kelumki. In the past, the Paiki governs the community in absolute. Every matters pertaining to the community is brought to the Paiki, and the decision of the Paiki binds in absolute. The Paiki continues to rule or govern the Heraka community to the present day. However, in matters pertaining to distinguishing sacred and secular, the Kelumki is the centre of the village or community in the sacred sphere.

The Donyi-Polo movement on the other hand finds it difficult to distinguish or sustain between the two dichotomy of religious and non-religious. Though the Gangging movement emphasize on the importance of having a house of worship; there are many believers of Donyi-Polo who do not give much emphasis on the Gangging. There are only about 40% of the believers of Donyi-Polo who attend the Gangging. In the recent years, some priests reiterated that anybody who goes to ganging (house of worship) is a follower of Donyi-Polo. Therefore, the Gangging is in becoming of a sacred space. However, in comparison to the Heraka, the Donyi-Polo is yet to demarcate between the two dichotomy of sacred and secular.

**Codifying Religious Text**

The rise of literacy and the adoption of the religious text called the Hingde\(^{11}\) enable the Heraka in codifying their text and influencing the people particularly in the urban areas. The Hingde is not merely a law whose authority resides in the supernatural realm, but the way for individuals to discipline their life together. Therefore, the Heraka Hingde tries to control actions by drawing up edicts and trying to mend bad action with good action. For example, the Heraka issue Holy Marriage Certificates as a way of curtailing sexual

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\(^{11}\) The Hingde is a religious text or law book of the Heraka. It contains the basic tenets, laws and other guidelines for the Heraka believers.
activities and maintaining purity. This good action, which is praising virginity in the recent
time, has become the Heraka Hingde.\(^{12}\) Similarly, getting education, reading of the Hingde,
attending the Kelumki, and observing the Jalua are seen as good action and therefore have
become Heraka Hingde. Thus, the Hingde for the Heraka is constantly evolving around
good action. In this way the Heraka are still codifying their text.

However, the Donyi-Polo movement does not have a religious text like the Heraka,
and whatever text exists to the present day is a prayer book called Angun Bedang. This
lack of a religious text has prompted many reformers to codify a religious text. For
example, the Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang of Ngopok village of East Siang district in
Arunachal Pradesh has written an appeal letter to the Central Gangging of Pasighat for the
early publication of Yelam book.\(^{13}\) Therefore, there arises the need to codify religious text
among the believers of Donyi-Polo.

**Response to Christian Proselytization**

The leadership of the Donyi-Polo and Heraka movements came from highly
educated elite of the community who use culture and literature as their instrument of
propagation. Leaders like late Talom Rukbo, and Oshong Ering are the prominent persons
of Donyi-Polo movement. In the Heraka movement, prominent elites include late Rani
Gaidinliu, Ramkuiwangbe Newme, and late NC Zeliang. These individuals come from
highly educated class of their community.

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\(^{12}\) It may be mentioned here that in the days of Paupaise (pre-reform era), premarital sex was accepted and
even to some extent glorified.

\(^{13}\) Interview with Maliyang Perme, president of Donyi-Polo Yelam Kebang, Ngopok village, East Siang
district, Arunachal Pradesh on 16 March, 2011.
The Donyi-Polo and Heraka movements are an introspective response to meet the threat and challenge of Christianity towards the indigenous culture, religion and identity. Both for the Donyi-Polo and Heraka, Christianity is a foreign religion. In the initial years of conversion, when a person is converted to Christianity, the convert refuses to wear their traditional dresses, and refuses to participate in their cultural festivals. This marked off the converts not only from their indigenous religion, but also from the culture because religion and culture are identical in indigenous society. This created a division between the converts and the nativates. The follower of Donyi-Polo and Heraka are largely anti-Christian in their rhetoric because of conversion tactics employed by Christians in the past. Therefore, they try to distance themselves from Christian schools and instead rely on government schools or schools run by VHP like Saraswati Vidhya Mandir, Vivekananda Vidhyalaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya. This is one good reason why students of Donyi-Polo and Heraka in Hindu schools speak fluent Hindi.

However, by distancing from Christians, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka are entrenched in the Hindutva ideology of Hindu nation. This in turn apparently considered the Donyi-Polo and Heraka as Hindus by the Christians. Besides, some of them even consider themselves ad Hindus. The leveling of Christianity as foreign religion and the search for distinct indigenous identity however, do not strengthen their indigenous identity. What come into sight is leveling the Christians as ‘the other’, while maintaining close association with the larger religious identity of Hinduism. Therefore, indigenous religions are entrenched in the larger interest of the right wing Hindu nationalist discourse. For the Hindus, Hinduism is also an indigenous religion in the sense that it is not a foreign religion.
In other words, tribals are considered as part and parcel of the Hindu fold for the Hindu nationalists.

Nevertheless, there are Christian influences in the Donyi-Polo and Heraka reforms. The recent institution of *Hingde paume* (preacher) in Heraka is an influence of Christian method of evangelism. There is also Heraka women organization where recently they have started organizing conference. There is an elder forum instituted recently, called *Hangkia* which is organized area-wise like the Presbyterian[14] churches in NC Hills. In Donyi-Polo, recently they have instituted *Miris* (priests) who often go to villages or place to place to teach the Donyi-Polo religion. Therefore, like the Christians both the Donyi-Polo and Heraka have imitated Christianity despite of their rhetoric attack on Christians.

There are tensions between Christians and non-Christians. The Heraka and Donyi-Polo believers allege that the Christians are eroding the cultural and religious fabric of the society. The Christian converts desist themselves from associating or joining social functions including the festivals. The practices which are contrary to their religion are termed as satanic and sinful, and therefore, they openly denounce and dissociate themselves from such practices. Another charge being leveled against Christianity is that the converts tend to lose the basic morality. It is also alleged that Christians are abandoning popular folk songs and dances merely on the ground that these are superstitious in nature. The non-converts argue that the conversion is causing tension within family, villagers and the community. Christian converts on the other hand argue that the religious elements in the old life did not in any way alienate or result in the loss of people’s identity because the

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[14] The Presbyterians churches have area-wise administrative unit, which cuts across states for efficient administration.
traditional religious element had not contributed to that in the first place. In fact, it is in the new forms of religious life (Christianity) that the tribal identity is strengthened.

There are two groups within the Christian converts: the liberal and the conservative. The proponents of the liberal view favor the integration of many of the traditional socio-cultural practices with Christianity. This group tends to be inclusive in dealing with other religious communities including the indigenous religion. The catholic Christians are liberal and accommodative than the protestant as far as their dealing with the socio-religious aspect of the tribal is concerned. For an instance, the Catholics in NC Hills are more accommodative towards the Heraka. They usually participate in cultural festivals, and often brew the traditional rice beer and join the Heraka in drinking during festivals. The Catholics have even started celebrating the biggest festival, Hega n’gi on 28th December every year. Similarly, the Catholics in Arunachal Pradesh are more liberal towards preserving culture, and often accommodative in celebrations and festivals.

The conservative group insists strict adherence to the religious ideology and to some extent they believe in the notion of superiority of their religion. Particularly, the Baptists are staunch conservative who refuse to participate or join in celebration during the Heraka festivals. The same kind of situation prevail in Arunachal Pradesh, it is the Baptist who are more conservative and refuse to participate in their cultural festivals and other related celebration. Generally, educated Christians subscribe to the liberal view while the less educated and illiterate are more incline to the conservative group. Therefore, it is the educated or elite group who plays the role of bridging the gap between the Christians and the non-Christians. They actively participate in the community festivals and even some of them offer leadership in the celebration committee. This is true even with the Baptists in
Zeliangrong society, where educated Baptists in recent times realize the importance of preserving their culture and identity.

Similarly, there are two groups within the non-converts; the liberal and the conservative. The conservative group is staunchly against the Christian religion while the liberal believes in the inclusive religious ideology. The conservative seeks complete disassociation or even prohibition of the Christians from attending socio-religious functions including the festivals on the ground that their presence vitiates the very purpose of the ritual. The liberal argue that one’s religion should not disqualify him/her from freely joining or participating in the festivals as it represents the broader aspect of indigenous culture.

It is therefore, the inherent ideological divisions within the Christian converts as well as within the indigenous religious believers that sustain a kind of restraining force from friction or conflict between the two religious ideologies. The liberal views evolved within the two religious communities have been putting the respective opposite views in a balance. Despite the virtual polarization of people into two religious groups, it has not yet reflected in the electoral politics. In other words, religion has never been an issue during the elections as these are being contested on the line of party politics and the individual capabilities in terms of merit or ability matters a lot.

There is contention between the urban settlers and villagers among the followers of Donyi-Polo and Heraka. The association of Donyi-Polo and Heraka leaders with the Hindu based organizations among the elites or urban settlers have become a bone of contention. It perturbed many people who support the indigenous religious movements. For an instance,
the Heraka leaders who are mostly from the urban areas have close association with various Hindu organizations. This is evident from the influence of Hinduism in their activities. In the urban areas, in the Heraka homes, there are postures and calendars of Hindu gods and goddesses circulated by the Hindu organizations. There is a symbol of om in some Heraka homes in the urban areas. Besides, the Heraka in the urban areas have recently stopped eating beef because of their association with the Hindus. However, in the villages, the Heraka still practice the teachings of Rani Gaidinliu, and are not associated with the Hindus. This virtual polarization prevail in Heraka, as most of the villagers are in the recent years are indifferent to some of the leaders from the urban areas.

Similarly, the followers of Donyi-Polo in urban areas have close association with Hindu organizations. For an instance, the former chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Gegong Apang received the support of RSS to promote the Donyi-Polo religion. In the Donyi-Polo homes in urban areas there are postures and calendars of Hindu gods and goddesses circulated by the Hindu organizations. In the villages, the priests as well as the believers are close to their tradition and culture. The villagers argue that if they are to retain their indigenous religion, they must maintain it in its original form and should avoid closely association or assimilation with other religious group, and that there should be no admixture or imitation from any other religion, which will dilute the meaning and sanctity of the indigenous faith and belief system. Therefore, there is polarization, though not apparent between the villagers and the leaders or elites who come from the urban areas. In town areas, the tribals join the Hindu festivals during celebration.

Mode of Re-vitalization: A Comparative Analysis

Westernization in the name of modernization have brought about a great change in the social set-ups of the people of North East India that contributed to a lot to the erosion of their traditional religion and culture. Therefore, there arise for the need of remedial measures in order to preserve, protect and promote the indigenous religion and culture of the tribal populations. The re-vitalization of the Donyi-Polo movement in Arunachal Pradesh is accomplished through the introduction of weekly prayers system. It is the demand of time that weekly prayer centres are established among the supporters of the Donyi-Polo movement. It is through such weekly prayer meeting that young people are made aware of their ancient traditional wisdom and knowledge. The new system of worship and prayers in the reformed religion are strictly based on the eternal religious philosophies. In order to attract the younger generation, the way of worship and prayer are made simple, meaningful, and attractive. The content or meaning of the prayer songs composed are in tune with philosophy, and music of the devotional songs are traditional and melodious.

There are also frequent preaching tour programs in order to strengthen the Donyi-Polo movement and to recharge the people spiritually. Besides, workshops and seminars are held frequently to share the success as well as to discuss the problems, and to find solutions. There are also training programme for youth so that spiritual knowledge are imparted, and making them aware of the ill-effects of religious conversion, and day to day practical problems of life. The young generations generally tend to confuse the social evil practices of their own culture, and feel a sense of inferiority complex. For an instance, people kill mithun or buffalo for appeasing the evil spirits when people become sick. Due
to this reason, they easily leave the indigenous religion and embrace alien religion. Therefore, some educated elite envisage the eradication of social evil practices or reformation on the different social practices has become an important matter.

Similarly, the Heraka also have frequent preaching tour programs in order to strengthen the movement, to bring awareness about Heraka religion, and to bring the *paupaise* to the Heraka fold. Literary events, seminars and workshops are organized especially targeting the young generations. However, unlike the Donyi-Polo movement, the Heraka does not have a weekly prayer programs. This is because the Heraka offers prayers only on the full moon day, and their house of worship is not open on any other day. For the Heraka, most of their songs were composed by Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu, and it is sung in the *kelumki* (house of worship) on the full moon day.

Another similarity between the Donyi-Polo and Heraka movement in re-vitalizing their movements is that both the movements have a preacher in the recent years. In most of the indigenous religions, there were no preachers in the past. The institution of *Hingde Paume* (Heraka preacher) is a recent phenomenon. This is instituted in order to bring awareness about Heraka religion in Zeliangrong villages, especially in the *paupaise* areas. In the same way, the Donyi-Polo has also instituted a preacher for the re-vitalization of the movement. The Donyi-Polo preacher used to go to villages and preach about the Donyi-Polo religion. Sometimes, the preacher distributed booklets, cassettes, and other religious books. Most of the remedial measures adopted for the re-vitalization of the indigenous movements are similar. Only in few cases they are different. For an instance, Heraka do not conduct weekly prayer meeting as a means of re-vitalizing their movement.
CONCLUSION

The Donyi-Polo and Heraka are indigenous movements which embark on with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting their indigenous religion and culture. In most of the indigenous movement around the globe, the right to self-determination, political autonomy, and control of natural resources forms an important aspect. But, forging of religious and cultural identity based on indigenous tradition forms an important aspect of the indigenous religious reform movements in North East India. These movements are expressed in the formation of cultural and literary societies, recording of myths, legends or in other words, recovery of their past, traditions and history. In the initial years, some of the reform movements were rather a blending of Hinduism and Christianity. Conversely, the rhetoric of Hindutva propaganda of branding Christianity as foreign religion has facilitated the Hindus to come closer to the indigenous populations. Besides, the indigenous populations are largely anti-Christian in their rhetoric because of conversion tactics employed by Christians in the past.

The Indian nationalist ideology, on the other hand, does not accept the concept of ‘indigenous people’ as relevant for India. Attempts to use this term in the Indian context have always been officially rebuffed. It has repeatedly been argued that, in India, there are linguistic and religious minorities, but no ‘indigenous people’ or ‘ethnic minorities’ which are descended from any ancient indigenous stock/races/peoples. Partly as a reaction to British imperialist propaganda, the dominant nationalist discourse is also profoundly
homogenizing. Nevertheless, apart from the dominant discourse, there is the indigenous discourse that attempts to provide an alternative search for indigenous identity through the cultural distinctness, and geographical isolation.

Hindus do not convert the tribal populations but rather assimilate them into the mainstream. What it means to be a Hindu for the RSS is a larger question that is associated with cultural nationalism. The sole agenda of the RSS among the tribal population is that of building the Hindu nation. For an RSS ‘a person who had taken birth in India, who may follow any religion, caste, creed or any form of worship but who thinks that India is his motherland and holy land is a Hindu’. The RSS attempt to cultivate and impart the sense of nationalism to everyone and do not compel anybody to be a Hindu. Therefore, religion became the sole criterion of defining and assimilating the tribals into the larger society for the right wing Hindu nationalists.

The close association of Donyi-Polo and Heraka with Hindus makes it difficult to demarcate the religious boundaries between them. Christians considers them as Hindus, and even some of the followers of indigenous religions claim themselves as Hindus. For the Christians, they are Hindus because they practice some of the Hindus way of life. For an instance, recently, the Heraka has stopped eating beef because of its close association with the RSS. Some Heraka have even stopped chewing betel nuts. Besides, in some Heraka and Donyi-Polo homes, especially in town areas, there are postures of Hindu gods, symbol of om, Hindu calendar published and circulated by Hindu organizations. The close

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association and the influence of Hinduism among Donyi-Polo and Heraka make it difficult for them to maintain their distinct religious identity.

Donyi-Polo and Heraka accused the Christians, that Christians are responsible for the loss of their indigenous culture. Donyi-Polo and Heraka considers their religion and culture as inseparable. Hindus extended their help to the Donyi-Polo and Heraka because like Hinduism, they are also the indigenous religion of India. The ideology of Hindutva is entrenched among the follower of Donyi-Polo and Heraka. The RSS considers the (tribals) indigenous people as Hindus. As a result, the indigenous people are made to consider India as their motherland and holy land. Besides, the RSS inculcates the tribals to respect the ancient Indian culture and tradition. This similar line of thinking, that is respecting one’s culture, tradition and religion conveniently brought the Donyi-Polo, Heraka and the RSS together. Both for the Hindus and the tribals, Christianity is a foreign religion, and that their holy land is not in India.

In order to dissuade the tribals from attending Christian mission schools, the Hindu organizations established various schools in the tribal areas. At the same time, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka students also do not want to attend the Christian mission schools. This is because some Christian schools proselytized the non-Christian students. Therefore, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka try to distance themselves from Christian schools and instead rely on government schools or schools run by VHP like Saraswati Vidhya Mandir, Vivekananda Vidhyalaya and Kendriya Vidyalaya. However, the VHP run school requires its students to say a pledge that indicates the difficult position for the tribals. The strong
integrationist ideology that is part of such a Hindu organization places the tribals in a difficult position.

The Heraka by ethnicity are Nagas, but because of their religion, they try to distance themselves from the other Christian Nagas. At the same time, the Heraka do not want to identify themselves with the Hindus. Therefore, the Heraka rhetoric has been strategically constructed around the Christian and Hindu agendas that constantly evoke in them the need to adapt. So Heraka identity is formed along these distinct fault lines and as a result, they are not seen as one or the other. In the eyes of Hindu organizations they are anti-conversion and by default anti-church, and in the eyes of Christians they are Hindus, and therefore not Nagas. Nevertheless, since Heraka attempts to preserve traditional faith and culture, their belief is local.

There are ambiguities in the Donyi-Polo and Heraka’s attempt to maintain distinct cultural identity, separate social space and religious outlook. The RSS appropriation and the misgivings of the Donyi-Polo and Heraka movements is something which the Donyi-Polo and Heraka are not able to resist because they are embedded in the Hindutva nation-building project. Therefore, the struggle to maintain a distinct Donyi-Polo and Heraka identities and to promote their religious reform movements became ineffective or misguided. Besides, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka’s search and claim of their religious indigeneity have facilitated the confluence. This is because along with the RSS, Donyi-Polo and Heraka consider Christianity as foreign religion. Therefore, Christianity became one of the important factors or perhaps the most important factor that brought the Heraka and the RSS together in the recent years. Besides, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka often tries to
broaden and transcend local influence and elevate their indigenous religion so that it can compete with world religions. The closeness with the RSS in fact helped the Donyi-Polo and Heraka in propagating their religion in a broader and higher platform. However, in sharing the higher platform with the RSS some of the Hindu elements are incorporated into the Donyi-Polo and Heraka day to day life. Therefore, the Donyi-Polo and Heraka are either seen as Hindus or part of Hinduism.