CHAPTER TWO
SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL
LIFE OF ANCIENT NAGAS

The Naga society, one of the oldest tribal societies of the north-eastern India, has a varied tribal and sub-tribal who originally belong to Indo-Mongoloid and Mongoloid, and people have a prehistoric cultural history. Their present society is the outcome of the background of their tribal interaction, intermarriage, intermingling, and the ancient political, social and religious structure. The early Naga society occupied the territories presently known by them and their activities were scattered, isolated and not united at all after the advent of society. The Naga tribes who later took on the civilized life and occupied different parts have been guided by the ancient political system surrounding all the different people. Rather the society, 

practiced traditional and tribal way of life. The change in their way of life was gradual and it led to a new form of life.
CHAPTER -TWO
SOCIAL POLITICAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF
ANCIENT NAGAS

The Naga society is one of the oldest tribal societies of the world and it comprises of various tribes and sub-tribes who originally belong to Indo-Mongoloid race. The Naga people have a prolonged chequered history of their own which presents the historical background of their origin, migration, confrontation, internecine war-fare and also their ancient political, social and religious accounts. The various Naga tribes who migrated to the territories presently occupied by them from the Central Asia in B.C., remained scattered, inimical and untouched to each other till the arrival of the British in their land. The Naga tribes who migrated to the northeastern part of India and settled permanently occupying different hills ridges hardly tried to form unity among them and organise a polity comprising all those Naga people. Rather they remained inimical to each other and practiced ‘head-hunting wars’ with the result that the enmity and bitterness among various Naga tribes continued till the British occupied Naga Hills. Moreover, such behaviours kept them confined to the place which they occupied initially and developed the attitude of isolation and separation.

The Naga society has been carrying out notable sets of traditional customary practices and social, cultural and political moorings from time immemorial despite the disintegration of the Naga tribes. Like other tribal societies it has passed through different phases of barbarism, semi-civilization and civilization. The ancient Naga people though divided into numerous tribes, sub-tribes, and clans, and speaking different tongues, they maintained their different customary laws, possessed a common history, have common feeling and common political aspirations and also a strong desire for independent and free life style. It was the Naga’s common traditional culture, cultural and social values and political aspirations that have remained the centre of attraction for the scholars and researchers. There are various questions related to the Naga people which have not yet been answered satisfactorily and objectively. Some of the questions are; who are the Nagas?
Why are they called Nagas? Are they indigenous Indian tribes or have they migrated to this part? What cultural and social values the ancient Nagas possessed? This chapter discusses the Naga's ancient social, religious and political cultural values and their relevance in the life of modern Naga people.

It is universally accepted fact that the Naga people had been simple, friendly and hard working. They are self-respecting fellows and egoistic by their nature. The Naga society before the arrival of the British and English culture, was classless and casteless. The ancient Nagas did not make any distinction among themselves on the basis of class and birth. They preferred equality. They maintained good physique and remained always cheerful and smart. By faith they all were animist before the spread of Christianity among them. Unfortunately there is no written history about the ancient Naga people. However a number of Palaeolithic tools recently discovered in Nagaland and Manipur throw some light on the early Naga history, their culture, religion and socio-political life. Moreover, the folklores and myths carried out by the Nagas generation to generation also help one to ascertain the ancient Naga's cultural values and social-political behaviours. But such things do not present a clear and coherent picture about the ancient life of the Nagas.

Before the arrival of the British in Naga Hills and subjugation of various Naga tribes and establishment of the British administration, various Naga tribes had their social and political base. Each tribe maintained some sort of political organisation like republican democratic and monarchic. The customary laws and practices served as the base for the code of conducts and adjudication. Due to lack of proper communication they failed to establish contact with other peoples. Barbarism has remained the part of the uncivilized community. A barbaric people are uncultured, cruel and short sighted. They lack the vision. The practice of headhunting wars by the ancient Nagas raises the question whether the ancient Nagas were barbaric. The answer is not easy. Though the cruel practice of headhunting, which was very much frequent among the ancient Naga people, compels one to adopt the view that the ancient Nagas were barbaric and uncivilized, but, at the same time, the social organisation of the Naga tribes and their longing for democratic style

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1 M. Horam, Social & Cultural Life of the Nagas, Low-Priced Publications New Delhi, 1992, p88.
The headhunting war among the ancient Nagas was a customary practice which objective was to prove the warrior ship of the Naga male and also of a Naga tribe. The custom permitted the members of the tribe to take human heads either by regular warfare, raids or causal surprise. The practice of headhunting among the Naga tribes reflects the truth that the Naga people could hardly reconcile their rivals whosoever might be. It is often supposed that the raids and murders are due to revenge, disputes or blood feuds and that there is always more or less of a personal element in the affairs. There were some vital causes behind headhunting wars. According to Peal it was customary that the "the Nagas to obtain having tattoo on body and to obtain this certificate of manhood, must present their Raja with a human head... belonging to tribe not related." To do this act "a party of youths arrange the way lay a pool where the people of another tribe are certain soon to fish... They watch their opportunity and rush out, securing perhaps, three or four heads, though perhaps losing one." Peal further writes that the common cause for headhunting was not personal rivalry or any type of dispute or quarrelling. During the raid or attack mission was not to take the heads of the noted persons, but to take, as many heads as possible without paying any heed whose heads were taken. Stating the cause of the headhunting wars among various Naga tribes Horam maintains that "It was one spice of life and that was mere, almost the only way to recognition... He (Naga) could wish for nothing mere in life than to have his success first recognised, then praised, and finally rewarded by the group." He further says that the young group of the Nagas belonging to a particular tribe used "to take a head, bring it home in triumph, to be fetered as a warrior, to

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
Traditions, customs, superstitions and conventions have remained the founding stone of the tribal community all over the world. The Naga community is not an exception. The customary rules of the Nagas have remained the bedrock of their social and political behaviours in absence of advanced political organisation. It was the customary practices or customary laws written in the heart of every Naga, which enabled him to maintain internal peace and unity and keep the order in community. The customary laws provided the ancient Nagas to maintain social relations, preserve cultural values and resolve internecine feuds and disputes. Customs and conventions, in real sense, are more powerful than codified laws because the former are written not on the paper or in a constitution but on each heart of the member of the community. Customs are universally accepted social norms that cannot be defied unless the whole of the community or society rejects them. Moreover, a custom is a collective wisdom of the community, which is beneficial to everyone. That is another fact that, sometimes, some established customs or customary practices are harmful to the individual and the community both due to blind rigidity. But in general customs devoid of superstitions carry with themselves social values that are useful to all. In

case of the Nagas. The customary laws were so much dear to the Naga people that no one could dare to defy a custom. These were nicely maintained and protected by the early Nagas.

The whole fabric of the Naga society is woven in social, religious and political customs. The impact of such customs may easily be observed even today in the Naga society. For instance, the marriage system among the various Naga tribes has been modified today, the system modified still contains the relics of old practices. The marriage is mostly conducted within the near relatives or within the tribe. Relationship between wife and husband is sacred. The wife follows the domiciles of the husband soon after marriage and the husband is bound to maintain his wife according to his capacity and earnings. This is the old practice that no Naga can marry another woman until divorce is accepted. This practice of monogamy is still honoured by the Naga people in general. Among the Ao Nagas custom does not allow one to marry a girl from his own clan. If it happened, the marriage is declared void. According to Tajenyuba "it is a problem for young boys and girls of a predominant clan to get suitable partners. And it is a fact that many of them spoil their life career". The crimes of adultery and seduction are still treated with the utmost severity. The offenders are brought before the assembly of the people to investigate the offence, and the punishment is prescribed after full verification of the crime. If they found guilty, he or she is given severe punishment, which is exemplary. The girls have the freedom to choose the husbands of their choice. There is enough scope for love marriage. Dowry system hardly exists in the Naga society. However, according to the customs the bridegroom's parents (specially among the Aos) give valuable presents to the bride's parents. After marriage the new couple begins their own independent life living separately from their parents. Divorce is permissible, no doubt, but it must be based on reasonable ground where consent of both the wife and husband is a must. The customary court used to grant divorce. A divorced woman has the right to claim her maintenance.

Customary funeral practices among the Nagas are based on religion and religious faith. The Nagas from the beginning believe in survival of souls even after death. That is why the parents. After marriage the new couple begins their own independent life living separately from their parents. Divorce is permissible, no doubt, but it must be based on reasonable ground where consent of both the wife and husband is a must. The customary court used to grant divorce. A divorced woman has the right to claim her maintenance.

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1 Tajenyuba, Ao Nagas Customary Laws, Guwahati, 1957, pp. 74-75.
The Ao people practiced purely democratic form of the political organisation because their faith in democratic life was unshakable. A study of ancient political organisations of the Naga people reveals the fact that among other Naga tribes the political system of the Ao people was more advanced and systematic. It was all due to their advanced political consciousness, which they maintained from the beginning. The Ao people believed in equality, liberty and fraternity. Hence they incorporated all these democratic principles in

their political life. The ancient Ao villages were symbol of the republic. The council of Tajenyuba, Ao Nagas Customary Laws, op. cit., pp.339-40.

Entire social and political system of the Ao people were structured under the system of Putumenden (Village State Republic). The system was so sound, democratic and attractive that various British administrators and authors have highly appreciated it. For instance, E. Elwin, the popular English author, appreciating the democratic spirit and political system of the Ao Nagas, wrote that “Each village amongst the Aos is a small republic, and each man is as good as his neighbours, indeed it would be hard to find anywhere else more thoroughly democratic communities. Head men, Tatars, so exist but their authority is very small.”

However, exercise of such power was subject to public welfare in general. The Tatars were collectively responsible to the village people for the proper use of their power. There was prescribed time to meet for deliberations. The court of the Tatars tried all cases civil and criminal. With the imposition of the British rule on the Naga people and appointment of the Gaonbuhrs in the village the powers of the Council of Tatars was reduced. Today, the Government business is conducted by the Gaonburhas in the villages. The Tatars are not responsible for Government’s notices and works in the villages. However, the Government’s orders concerning the village welfare are brought to the notice of the Tatars for consideration, but their suggestions are obligatory.

The least that can be said of the Naga is that in general he has mental outlooks and mental processes for more consistent with those of the Europeans than has the ordinary native of India…”

The political system either of republican democratic or of aristocratic monarchic maintained by the ancient Nagas was not based on the written constitution. It was

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customary laws, which served as the constitutional base. There was no defiance of the authority. Rather people were loyal and obedient to the rule and the ruler. This was all because the ancient Nagas possessed political spirit like the people of the ancient Greece. The customs that had collective wisdom of the people used to keep the people in discipline. A king or a chieftain was treated as the repository of God’s favour. They maintained special status and enjoyed special privileges, no doubt, but their behaviours and treatments towards general mass were sound and reasonable.\(^1\) The ruler acted “as the sagacious agent of the people. This all was possible due to ‘age-honoured customs’, which served as “a great measure of order, peace and stability to the Nagas.”\(^2\) Asoso Yonuo has rightly observed that “these customs that make them sane and became sometimes stronger than laws, for customs originate out of the conscience of the people ordained by God and are considered natural; selection of those modes of action with justice.”\(^3\) The ancient Nagas knew that to violate the customs meant to breach the religion which consequently meant “incurring wrath of the Almighty and His ultimate punishment. It was the customary laws which bonded the Naga family, clan, the village and the tribe.”\(^4\) In the words of Panger Imchen “The custom is unwritten law established by usage that has been transcended from time immemorial... Ao customary law and ethical value systems were universal which has become common law for the Ao community” even today. \(^5\) To the Ao people custom is yet anchor for his little ship of state, and trivial breaches of custom often cause turmoil, seemingly out of all proportion to its importance.

It is true that the Nagas before coming in close contact with the western Christian missionaries and adopting Christianity as their religion were animist. But it does not mean that they were anti-religious. Animism itself is a kind of religion. The word ‘animism’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘anima’ that means ‘breath’. So it carries the idea of soul or spirit. Soul is the fundamental concept of tribal religion. It is a belief that all objects have their soul. The concept of soul is based on polytheism. Tribal religion is based on myths which generally teach people how the supreme being works and reveals her/his

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\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Panger Imchen, Ancient Ao Religion and culture, New Delhi, 1993, p.105
mysteries through creation, the place of the animal kingdom in this universe and so on. So far the case of the ancient Nagas is concerned, they were animist having strong faith in supreme or natural forces being the fundamental cause of creation and maintenance of creation. The early Nagas carried various religious myths that served as their religious scriptures and creed in absence of any prescribed religion. The religious myths helped them not only to understand the environment and universe but also to shape their social and cultural life.

Tribal religion is basically a community religion where individual life and community life are inseparable. Belief and action could not be separated in early period. There was intimate relationship between worship and action. In absence of prescribed religious scriptures the religious faiths, which the early Nagas maintained, made them religious and kept them in order. Religious ethos contained in people’s hearts, minds created oral history and adopted old rituals enabled them to be social and move towards a civilized life. Tribal religion lacks founder, but unflinching faith in religious practices served strong bond to maintain and protect religion. Absolute faith in unseen power of the Nagas shaped their social, cultural and even political behaviours. According to M.M. Thoms in the tribal world view “There is the sense of spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living natural objects, spirits and gods, the individual, the clan, the tribe, animals, plants, minerals and man form an unbroken hierarchical unity of spiritual fore. The self of man is not an individual self, but an extended universal self present and actively participating in all the part of totality.” In a tribal world view one cannot make a clear cut division between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between spiritual and the material areas of life. All cultural components are loosely related.

The community of the Nagas passing through the phase of animism believed in a power superior to allow and capable of doing anything for both good and bad. They believed in spirit and its reflection through various agencies and means. They realised the nearness of such power and adopted some forms of worship to please such force for blessing and avoiding curse or unhappiness of the power. Such faith and action of the early Nagas moulded them towards life of decency and discipline on the one hand, and set up religious

1 M.M. Thoms” Modernization of society and Struggle for new Cultural Ethos”, in Ecumenical Review, Vol. XVIII, No.4, October 1966, p.429
rituals and social practices on the other. It compelled them to develop disciplined habits suppressing their wild emotions and instincts. In fact, their faith in unseen power and also the fear of displeasure of such power served the ancient Naga people the cause of their cultural and social behaviour. It forbids them from doing harms and ills to other at least within the community or the tribe, which they belonged. It also led them towards establishing social customs and rituals relating to worship gods, ancestral souls, natural objects and celebrating festivals. Religion though animistic, opened the way for ethnic culture and projected the Naga behaviours towards new ethics upgrading their moral conduct. It brought them new values such as honesty, sincerity, simplicity, truthfulness, obedience and more commitment to fellow life.

According to Robinson the faith of the Nagas in superior natural force brought for the Nagas “more just and adequate conceptions of the power that presides the nature.” The Nagas began to feel that “There must be some universal cause to whom all things are indebted for their being. They appear also to acknowledge a divine power to be the maker of the world and the disposer of all events.” ¹ The human mind even when least improved and invigorated by culture, shrinks from the thought of annihilation and looks forward with hope and expectation to a state of future existence.² In the words of Robinson “This sentiment of soothing consolation, resulting from a sacred consciousness of its own dignity, from an instinctive longing after immorality, is universal, and may be deemed natural.” The Naga thought in the early period had no established form of worship and they had no temples erected in honour of their deities and no ministers to their services.” They have the knowledge, however, of several superstitious ceremonies and practices handed down to the, by tradition; and to these they have recourse with a childish credulity, when roused by any emergence from their usual insensibility, and excited knowledge the power and to implore the protection of superior beings.”³

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
According to the note of John Butler the Angamis believed that if they had led good and worthy lives upon this earth, and abstained from all coarse food, and specially had abstained from eating flesh, after death their spirits would fly away into the realms above, and there became stars.¹ It means the Angamis possessed the faith in continuation of the circle of life and such faith made them honest and pious. Though the ancient Angamis had no idea of a supreme God, they believed in the existence of evil spirits, which live inside the rocks, threes, and pools of water. To avoid the wrath of such spirits they adopted some forms of worshipping and religious rituals that are still in practice among the Angamis and other Naga tribes.

Religious customs or religious superstitions established in a community of the ancient Naga people had no place for individuality. It was a common faith, common practice and common celebration. That is why whenever a religious ceremony was celebrated, participation in it was a must for every Naga. While performing such acts they all used to sing and dance together. The faith in natural power either evil or good paved the way for emergence of various ceremonies among the Naga people where common dinning, singing and dancing became the integral parts of ceremonies either religious or social. This developed unity and integrity among the members of a Naga tribe and his absolute belonging to the community or tribe. Horam has rightly remarked “Dancing, singing, eating and drinking and the main highlights of all Tankhul festivals.”² Such practice is still visible among the Nagas today because they inherited such things from their ancestors.

Customs and traditions of a society either traditional or modern never disappear in toto. In fact the whole fabric of the society is woven with social, religious and political customs. Specially among the tribal society customs play a vital role in providing the society a suitable base even the society becomes modern. The Naga society, which claims itself modern today, has not separated itself totally from its ancient norms and practices. The impact of early customs may easily be marked in the entire social, religious and political behaviours of the modern Nagas. This is another fact that today the binding of social norms and values, which were practiced by their forefathers, are declining.

² Horam, Social and Cultural Life of Nagas, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1992, p. 58
The system of marriage among the Nagas has been modified today, no doubt, but it still contains the relics of old practices. Marriage is a religious pious act of the Naga people. During the British period Naga's marriage was mostly conducted within the near relatives such as cousins in preference to other women. This is celebration where all the relatives and friends are invited. Relationship between wife and husband was made sacred in the eye of the people and they were supposed to be one soul after marriage. The wife followed the domiciles of the husband soon after marriage. The husband was bound to maintain his wife according to his capacity and earnings. On the other hand, the wife was supposed to cooperate the husband even at the time of distress and calamity. According to an established custom “a man can remarry his deceased wife’s real sister provided there is no other impediment for marriage. A brother can also marry his deceased brother’s wife because the brothers are in the same degree and the wife is from a rightful clan for marriage. A widow having no children cannot marry a stranger, but must marry her late husband’s brother. Such customs cannot be overlooked even today. There is practice of monogamy among the Nagas from the early period, but no Naga can marry more than one girl at a time. Among the Aos marriage with the girl of the same clan is prohibited. It happens sometimes, such marriage is declared void and severe penalty is inflicted upon the persons violating such custom. Due to practice of exogamy among the Aos “It is a problem for young boys and girls of a predominant clan to get suitable partners, and it is a fact that many of them spoil their life career.” However, such binding has put a check upon the growth of polygamy and polyandry system of marriage in Nagaland.

The crime of adultery and seduction were treated with the utmost severity. The offenders were brought before the assembly of the people to investigate the offence. The punishment was given after full verification of the crime. Generally the offender was “tied with cane cords to a tree and there crucified.” In some clan it was the practice “to deprive both the seducer and seduced of their lives.” Somewhere the seducer was “placed in a basket, his hands and feet tied together, and he is rolled many times from the summit of a hill until life be extinct.”

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1 Tajenyuba Ao, Ao Nag Customary Laws (Gopal Printing Works, Guwahati, 1957), pp. 74-75.
2 John Butler, A Sketch of Assam, op. cit., 524.
Worshiping and prayer before starting a thing among the Naga people is still common because they inherited such practice from their ancestors. Before performing any project such as putting seeds, going on hunting or fish excursions or to enter upon any war expedition, the people used to assemble and some sort of consultation laws held between the chief ruler and the elders of the village in order to avoid unpleasant happenings.

In the Naga society the girls have the freedom to choose the husband of her choice. There is no real dowry system among the Nagas. However, according to the custom the bridegroom, parents (specially among the Aos) generally give valuable presents to the bride, parents. The usual custom is that engagement continues for three years before marriage is solemnised and during the engagement the bride and bridegroom remain faithful to each other. After marriage the new couple begin their own independent life living separately from the parents. Divorce is permissible in the Naga society according to the custom, no doubt, but it must be based on reasonable ground and having the consent of both the wife and the husband.

Customary funeral practices among the Naga people are based on reason and religious faith. The Nagas from the beginning believe in survival of souls even after death. That is why the dead body of a person is buried with honour and dignity. According to established practice the dead body of a man is washed by his son and then covered with white clothe. The side of the dead body places thereafter some baskets full of food grains along with garlic. Before disposing off the dead body a funeral feast is arranged generally after noon. The dead body is put into the coffin along with some weapons like dao and spear. The coffin is carried to the burial place followed by the family members, relatives, friends and villagers. Besides these, many rituals followed which are participated by relatives and friends. The process of death ceremony among the Nagas is lengthy and expensive both.

The cultural values, which are the common properties of the Naga people even today, are their ancestral gifts. In the words of Horam to the ancient Nagas “ethics were not different from religion... Every person was subject to law of tradition. To obey was piety; to destroy was impious and the rule of obedience was enforced upon each individual by the
will of the community to which he belonged."¹ The commitment to the community for the Nagas was based on the idea that a community is custodian of individual’s security and safety. The community belonged to the individual and the individual belonged to the community. Everyone had full freedom to express his/her will, but at the same time everyone was bound to obey the decision of the community which was taken after full deliberations amid the presence of adult villagers.² According to Puthenpurkal “Every Naga knew that all discussions should lead to some conclusions. And once a decision is arrived at, a Naga is ready to obey it. He had great respect for his village elders and tribal chieftains.”³ Such was the democratic spirit and discipline of the ancient Nagas. Dalle Namo has rightly remarked “Democracy is a way of life for Nagas. It is a part of our existence. If the Greek had city-states, in Nagaland every village is a small republic.”⁴

The ancient Naga people though lacked the Machiavellian skill and spirit of politics, they had the wisdom to rule themselves organising police force (warrior ship), judicial court, legislature and prison. According to Asoso Yonuo the system which the old Nagas adopted and practiced was “perfectly a government which indicates not to, in fact, the right of his fellows but to respect them for the return of the same kind of respect as to have a peaceful community where all human beings work to be equal in respect of the rights, opportunities, notwithstanding the inequality and ability, to a good, just and free life.”⁵

The most attractive feature of each Naga village has been the Morung, a common place of assemblage of the village youths and a sort of village educational institution to impart social, cultural and educational values to the coming generation. The Morung bears several names. In the southern group of western Rengmas it is called Rensi, in the northern group it is termed as Azughu and in the language of eastern Rengma it is known as Awikhu. The Morung has remained the “centre of traditional social life and fulfils a number of purposes.” The Morung is, in fact, a learning place for the younger generation where their elders tell them the legends. They also learn the significance of life and various types of social and cultural values, which are passed on from one generation to another.

¹ M. Horam, "Naga Religion: A Case Study", in Religion and Society of North east India, op. cit., p.15
³ Ibid.
⁵ Asoso Yonuo, The Rising Nagas, op. cit., pp. 18-19
For the women folk the Morung are taboo, but during festivals they may come with their children to the open ground in front of the Morung and watch dancing and other happenings. Today the significance of the Morung has declined, but during the early days it served multi-purposes of the Naga villagers. In olden days when there was neither any school nor any educational institutions the Morung was the place of common sitting and learning as well as meeting of the youngsters. It was a sanctuary where the new youth generation used to receive good sermons from their elders. The elders used to supply them not only happenings of the past but also some moral and ethical values for decent life. The Morung maintained sanctity. That is why even enemies were not harmed in the Morung. Abusive words were not allowed to be used in the complex of the Morung. It was treated like a temple where any kind of violent acts or ill will were not permitted. It was the place of piety and purity of thought and behaviour both. Strangers were treated politely in the Morung and they were given night shelter. Describing the significance of a Morung as a place of cultural values, Asoso Yonuo says that the Morung as a house is “an important educational, political and social institution” where the youngsters of the village “learn manners, discipline, art, stories, songs, war tactics, diplomacy, religious and customary rites and ceremonies living in it.” It has been a school for the young “to learn the art of livelihood, responsibility and cooperation before the Nagas came in contact with the modern education and life.”

The Naga community has been the rural based where cultivation and animal husbandry have been the basic occupation of the people. Since the climate is favourable and there is enough rain during monsoon period, the farmers do not face the problem of irrigation specially in the early age. The system of cultivation was collective farming. Barter system was rarely found. The Naga of the olden age worshipped work and everyone used to work in the field without any hesitation or reservation. So far the land ownership was concerned, in some of the tribes there was the system of private ownership, no doubt, but most of the uncultivated or wasteland belonged to clans of the village in common. The land was

1 Asoso Yonuo, The Rising Nagas, op. cit., p. 11.
2 Ibid.
believed as a gift of Almighty. Due to rise and growth of more villages and increasing population the common land property was occupied by different villages and in due course of time those villagers who established their hold over the land and forests claimed their private ownership. Thus the Naga economy “began with a measure of family communism and separated with a measure of rude capitalism.” Among Chang, Sema, Kuki etc the land belonged to the Chiefs of the villages.

Private ownership of land emerged in Nagaland “when men cultivating plots of land obtained perspective rights for ownership of cultivable plots of neutral land. Some of the common clan-lands were divided among the families of the clans enabling each family to have some plots of land.¹ Some village lands are transferred to the individual when he establishes his ownership over that land by making it fit for cultivation. Such individuals land is his private property and he can sell it as per his need or willingness. He may also mortgage his land with the consent of his family members to return or pay the debt.

Emergence of private ownership in Nagaland has paved the way for growth of inequality. The landless people got compulsion to work in the field of the rich farmers. On the death of the father his children are entitled to inherit the father’s properties equally. But this right is prohibited to widows and daughters. The notable point is that despite the emergence of private ownership among the Naga people, there was no scope for “big landlords, no extreme paupers, no millionaires, no slums and no beggars.”² It is all because of non-existence of bourgeois nature of the property system and lack of industrialisation. The ancient Naga’s wants were limited and they were self-satisfied with what they used to earn by using manual labour. The concepts like exploitation, social dignity at the cost of other etc. were not known to the early people. They all were treated like brothers and they all were dedicated to assist each other. There was no feeling of master and slave. There were no slavery system, robbery, theft, steeling etc. All these qualities in the Naga society began to decline with the appearance of new civilization.

The close association of the Naga people with the British administration and teaching of Christianity in various newly set up Churches by the third decade of the eighteenth century caused a major shift in the traditional faith and living of the Naga people and led

¹ Tajenyuba, Customary Laws, op. cit., p.59.
them to deviate from old cultural and social life. The traditional outlook of the Nagas and conventional practices began to lose their impact on the people, but slowly. The social, political, religious and economic concepts of the people began to change with the arrival of new western education and civilization. Their faith in their own customary laws, traditional social values and culture began to decline. The people slowly became apt, quick and smart in adopting and following new civilization and culture in the name of modernity. The modern Nagas “turned from the thrill of headhunting and fighting to the more useful thought.” With the arrival of foreigners in their land, new ideas, new philosophies and new style of thinking and life appeared in the Naga society, which dazzled the mind of conscious Nagas. The Naga society entered in the phase of social transformation. With the introduction of education in Nagaland by the Christian Missionary the Naga youths came in the light of new ideas and new knowledge which were totally unknown to. Education served as a tool of transformation of the Naga society. Modern education made the Nagas educated and taught them new way of life, no doubt, but at the cost of their traditional social and cultural values The new religion (Christianity) asked the Naga believers to part with all their old culture and follow the new European or American culture in almost all respect of life. The Missionaries “condemned our (Naga’s) old culture as most sinful, Godless and useless.”

Once the Naga society moved towards modernization, it hardly looked back to its past cultural moorings. The Naga society, which was traditional, became modern in various aspects. Young Naga generation become more and more prone to new life and new style based on western pattern of civilization. However, it is notable that the wave of modernization in Nagaland has not yet destroyed the old cultural pattern of the Nagas. It is all because modernization in Nagaland is not the product of its soil. Rather it is adoption by the new education generation. The result of transformation of the Naga society is that the society once was classless and casteless has turned into class division. The highly conscious Naga citizens availed the opportunity to become rich overnight coming near to the power or the power holders. Concept of the people changed. Individualism substituted collectivism in the Naga society. Lust for material life increased and people began to apply all the means fair or unfair to enrich themselves as early as possible.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Social transformation of the Naga society made the average Naga people materialist in approach of the life and copyist in their behaviour. The current of ‘westoxication’ in Naga society “determined the psycho-historical factors governing basic principles.” The external forces, which entered into the Naga Hills, broke up prolonged isolation of the Naga people. The external forces have consistently shaped the historical accounts of the Naga people. The rise of secularism and materialism in Naga society has given severe blow to the philosophy of religion and moralism. In ancient Naga society there was no scope for “big landlordism, no extreme paupers, no millionaires, no slums and no beggars.” Every Naga was self-sufficient. Their wants were limited and their conduct were honest and sincere. The concept like exploitation, high social dignity etc. did not exist at all. They were God-fearing people. In the transformed society old values began to disappear paving the way for growth of a number of modern social evils. However, the spread of Christianity and modern education among the Nagas taught them a number of good things also. In the words of Elwin, The activities of the Baptist Mission among the Nagas have demoralised the people, destroyed tribal solidarity and forbidden the joys and feasting, the decoration and romance of communal life because of sharpening of the Naga’s consciousness towards new life style.

Christian Missionaries who provided a new set of education and way of life played great role in changing the old pattern of Naga society and shaping a new society where enough scope was left for growth of modernity. The new order ushered in a period of tremendous change. The main agent of change was the Government itself. Christianity provided the means whereby the people of the region were able to accommodate themselves to the new world brought in by the British. According to Tarhuja “If one responsible dynamic factor was to be singled out for an overall changes in the society of the Nagas, it would undoubtedly be the introduction of Christianity among them.” The Christianity “ ushered in a transformation from animistic tradition based on superstitious practices to a more orderly society where the guiding principle was no longer that of natural human urges but based rather on the laws of God and love for one’s fellow man.” Horam is also of the view that

1 Asoso Yono, the Rising Nagas, op. cit., p22.
2 W.C. Smith, “Missionaries Activities and Acculturati0on of Backward People”, In the Journal of Applied Sociology March-April, 1923, p. 185.
Christianity while giving the Naga people new things damaged the old image and cultural values of the Naga people. Though spread of modernity among the Nagas, today, has damaged the values of Christianity, no doubt, but Christianity is still a dominant factor in the Naga society. There may not be two opinions about the fact that it was the British rule and the teaching of Missionaries, which caused basic change in the traditional, set up of the Nagas. These changed destroyed some of the cultural values, no doubt, but, at the same time, provided the Naga people with a new light and vision which ultimately enabled them to join the rank of civilized people.

According to Panger the arrival of Christianity destroyed Naga’s religious and cultural values threatening family norms, social ethics and cultural-religious meanings in the name of modernisation. His view in this regard is very much correct. But one should forget at the same time that the Christianity broadened the parochial Naga’s view and shaped a new society that became far better than the traditional society. Spread of Christianity opened the dynamics of Naga society, which flourished in various directions as the years rolled down.