Chapter 4

CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS OF RELIGION AND MORALITY IN THE AO NAGA CULTURE

Chapter four comprises of the contemporary analysis of religion and morality in the Ao Naga culture focusing on some of the discussions which were made in the previous chapters. The baggage of modernity in the form of Education, Literature and Technology and their influences on the Ao Naga tribe is analyzed under separate heads, discussing their negative and positive impacts.

An examination and research on the rapid growth of Christianity resulting from the efforts of the Christian missionaries who came to the Nagas in the 19th century is also undertaken for a more distinct world-view. This chapter also presents a brief discussion on the major influence of Westernization in the Ao Naga society. Along with Westernization, a thorough discussion on the development, due to diffusion, accumulation, adoption and assimilation of the Western ideology and beliefs, in the Ao Naga religious practices is undertaken. A Moral Cross-Cultural Dialogue is also inculcated in this chapter with critical examinations in to bring out the essence of the Tribal Moral Culture.
A. Modern Culture

In the present times we need a re-visioning of our understanding of religion and reality, particularly when there is a constant encounter between different cultures. The discoveries of science and technology also have led to the greatest revolution in human history.

Santa Ana says that:

_No revolution has so radically and permanently transformed the social order, habits, morals, mentalities and economic as well as political structures of all human societies as the industrial and technological revolution._

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Human cultures grow and develop in a slow process through the course of history. In the process of historical development, while the experiences of the followers are accumulated and handed down from one generation to another, on the other hand, new elements from other cultures are introduced, through accommodation, cross fertilization and diffusion and cultural process as a result of their unification. The existing developed culture of any community or nation is the result of these processes carried out over a period of hundreds and thousands of years.

The baggage of Modernity in the form of Technology, Western Culture, Christianity, Politics, Science, Medicine and Literature came to the Nagas with the establishment of British dynasty in India and the advent of American Christian missionaries to the north-eastern areas. The sowing of the seed of modernization affected not only the people’s perception but also brought about changes in all aspects in life of the Ao Nagas in particular and Nagas in general.

The encounter between the British colonial power and the Nagas can be traced back as early as 1832 when Captain Francis Jenkins and Captain R.B. Pemberton with 700 soldiers and 800 coolies came in search of a route between Manipur and Assam. In 1866, the British colonial power with their superior power subdued the Nagas and formed a new district within Assam known as Naga Hills, with its headquarter at Samaguting (Chumukedima). Later in 1878, the head-quarter of the Naga Hills district was shifted to Kohima. The final resistance against the colonial power by the Nagas was on November 22nd 1879 known as the Battle of Khonoma. The colonial power formally established its rule over the Nagas with the Battle of Khonoma and ruled parts of Naga area until 1947 as the Northern and Eastern parts of Naga territory were never conquered by the British.

Alongside with colonialism came modernism and missionary work to the Nagas. Rev. Miles Bronson was the first missionary to the Nagas and the first to start a school for the Nagas. In 1839, he visited Namsang, a Naga village.
Another prominent missionary to the Nagas was Rev. E.W. Clark. He worked among the Ao Naga tribe. He along with Godulla, an Assamese Christian convert taught the first Christian converts to read and write. He started the American Missionary Society at Impur, in 1894, which became the nerve centre of learning for the Ao, Sema, Lotha, Phom, Konyak, and the Khiamniungam tribes of the Naga.

Rev. D.E. Witter, an American Baptist was another notable missionary who in 1885 was sent to work among the Lotha Naga tribe in Wokha (district of Nagaland). Among the Angami tribe Rev. C.D. King was deputed. Christianity which came along with the colonization has not gone away with the withdrawal of the colonial power but continues to strife and grows among the tribes of the Naga even today.

Christianity came as a big sweep on the Naga tribal man, rejecting and nullifying every practice of the Nagas as paganism, primitive, unholy, superstitious etc. The masculine force of Christianity (conversion and missionary work) was too strong for the Naga culture. Very few cultural elements of the Nagas have been retained and accepted by the masculine force of Christianity. The Naga tribe with many other issues and problems is in search of an identity.
The Ao Naga tribe was the first to embrace Christianity in large number which was then followed by the Sema Naga tribe and the Lotha Naga tribe.\textsuperscript{250} The Angami tribe was slow in accepting Christianity. Christianity in Nagaland spread mainly due to local leadership.\textsuperscript{251} The acceptance of Christianity among the tribals of North East India, including the Naga was because they felt that Christianity would help them preserve their identity.\textsuperscript{252} The quests of a new integrated form of society which will overcome the deep split introduced into their lives by colonialism and imperialism is another reason for the acceptance of Christianity.\textsuperscript{253}

Christianity which was missionary-oriented came along with the colonial power. Its superior colonial power did less to accept the goodness and values of the culture of the Nagas, but instead convert. It considered the cultural practices and traditions as primitive and backward and set up schools and educational institutions to modernize the Naga tribes. Along with the educational institutions are the churches which work hand in hand. In a great deal, it was through the instrumentality of the educational institutions that Christianity began to win converts among the Nagas. The church, by the construction and establishment of educational institutions, clearly exhibited that to be modernized is to be educated.

\textsuperscript{250} Frederick S. Downs, \textit{Christianity in North East.}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{251} Alphonsus D Souza, \textit{Traditional Systems of Forest Conservation in North East India.}, p. 23.
The missionary spirit of Christianity saw that the first step of education is to be converted to Christianity and believe in Christ, the Light. Thus, becoming a Christian is often interpreted as coming to light from darkness, and perceives the traditional culture as primitive, as though the traditional culture has nothing to offer to live as human. The male chauvinism of Christianity with the aid of modernity questioned and sought reason in the traditional tribal beliefs as though it has the authority to do so and saw itself as superior to it. Thus, the tribal traditions and its practices needed to be converted, taught and modernized.

Perhaps one of the strong assets of the church in Nagaland even today is its established educational institutions on which it can dictate terms and affect policy making. Christianity as preached in the tribal areas of the Naga is as practiced and understood by the colonial missionaries and has done little to inculturate and incorporate the beliefs of the Nagas. Maybe, the Naga, as an agriculturist, found the Christ element less in its cultural life, but sees Christianity as a religion that does not affect his everyday cultural life.

1. Education

Modern education and development have brought tremendous change and an apparent new cultural situation among the Ao Naga. Christianity and education go hand in hand. In fact in the absence of schools, church-planting would be almost a failure in the Ao land. The role of Education sped up with so much pace that the old traditional practices began
to make an overwhelming change towards accepting the outside world especially Westernization.

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, research, or simply through auto didacticism. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts. Etymologically, the word "education" is derived from the Latin word ēducātiō meaning “a breeding, a bringing up, a rearing".254

The importance of education is quite clear. Education is the knowledge of putting one's potentials to maximum use. One can safely say that a human being is not in the proper sense till he is educated. This importance of education is basically for two reasons. The first is that the training of a human mind is not complete without education. Education makes man a right thinker. It tells man how to think and how to make decision. The second reason for the importance of education is that only through the attainment of education, man is enabled to receive information from the external world; to acquaint himself with past history and receive all necessary information regarding the present. Without education, man is as though in a closed room and with education he finds himself in a room with all its windows open towards outside world.

Education, if looked at beyond its conventional boundaries, forms the very essence of all our actions. What we do is what we know and have learned, either through instructions or

through observation and assimilation. When we are not making an effort to learn, our mind is always processing new information or trying to analyse the similarities as well as the tiny nuances within the context which makes the topic stand out or seem different. If that is the case, then the mind definitely holds the potential to learn more, however, it is we who stop ourselves from expanding the horizons of our knowledge with self-doubt or other social, emotional, or economic constraints.

While most feel that education is a necessity, they tend to use it as a tool for reaching a specific target or personal mark, after which there is no further need to seek greater education. Nonetheless, the importance of education in society is indispensable and cohering, which is why society and knowledge cannot be ever separated into two distinct entities.

Receiving a good education helps empower us, thus making us strong enough to look after ourselves in any given situation. It keeps us aware of the given surrounding as well as the rules and regulations of the society we are living in. It's only through knowledge that we can be able to question authority for its negligence or discrepancies. It is only then that we can avail our rights as a citizen and seek improvement in the structural functioning of governance and economy. It's only when a citizen is aware about the policies of the government one can he be able to support or protest the change. As a whole, people can bring about development only when they know where improvement is necessary for the greater good of mankind. Education helps us understand ourselves
better; it helps us realize our potential qualities as a human being. It helps us to tap into latent talent, so that we may be able to sharpen our skills.

An illiterate person simply gropes in the dark, leaving the result to chance or fate. He is ultimately dependent on others. In the olden times, farmers in India who could not read or write were cheated out of their land and willingly suffered exploitation and injustice only because they had no education. They were deprived of their rights by unscrupulous landlords, moneylenders and middlemen, who made them, put their thumb impressions on false documents of possession. Women in India had been suppressed, dominated and ill-treated only because they had no education. But now with their having been educated to a certain extent, the old situation has started changing quite fast. Now they have come out in the open to fight for their rights. They are not dependent on others, nor do they silently submit to whatever cruelty is meted out to them.

Education liberates a man’s mind from wrong thinking, ignorance, superstitions and prejudices. It frees him from evil influences and vices. It equips him with knowledge and skill, enabling him to make a good living, culminating in his being an ideal citizen. With the spread of education, gone are the days of bonded labour, economic slavery, pangs on account of being an untouchable and being misled by black magic. Thus it can be boldly claimed that education has awakened the masses all over the world.

Even a nation would be devoid of any progress, if its citizens fail to have the benefits of education. H.L. Wayland has correctly said, “Universal suffrage, without universal
education, would be a curse.” For the success of any democracy, education is a must. Imagine a country with illiterate ministers voted to power by illiterate people.\textsuperscript{255}

The introduction of modern education by the missionaries ushered in a modern world-view among the Ao tribal people. It is interesting to know that whenever a church was founded, a school was also established simultaneously by the early missionaries. These schools were known as Mission Schools. The missionaries, especially the Baptist missionaries, continued this policy as late as the forties; but after India’s Independence, the educational programme was either taken over by the Government or combined with the Government-run schools, and consequently this led to the Mission Schools being phased out or discontinued. However, the Mission Schools became the nurseries for change: they sowed the Gospel, established churches and provided a new world-view. It is in these schools that people assimilated not only a new faith, but also science, politics, technology and so on. Those attending schools became the vehicles of carrying the new world-view.

According to Downs, mission schools served two basic functions: first, it broke down the barriers of “superstition” that prevented people from hearing and responding to the

\textsuperscript{255} The Importance of Education, \url{http://www.shareyouressays.com/2284/503-words-essay-on-the-importance-of-education-free-to-read}
Gospel.\textsuperscript{256} Second, it provided a means of Christian instruction and access to the Christian scriptures and other forms of Christian literature. This served both an immediate evangelistic purpose and longer term objectives of building up indigenous Christian community.\textsuperscript{257}

The introduction of schools further augmented the creation of a tribal identity. The adopted language was made compulsory not only as literature and in Church gatherings but especially in schools. It served as a link between villages which were previously isolated because of different dialects. Besides this, schools helped to promote new social relationships among the people. This led to the restructuring of the traditional family, clan, village structure, and contributed to the solidifying of the entire tribe.\textsuperscript{258} Education not only brought together a sense of oneness among a single tribe but it also promoted inter-tribal relationships.

2. Literature

Ao literature is still in its infancy and will take some time to see its full bloom. Most of the existing literatures among the Ao Nagas are mainly oral and not documented until recently, researchers and scholars are becoming more conscious about the need to

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{258} Cf. O.L. Snaitang, “Christianity and Tribal Solidarity in Meghalaya” Indian Church History Review, June, 1994. p.35.
preserve their culture through writing as the adage goes, ‘A pen is mightier than the sword.’

Every term or name originates with a meaning either through an accident or through a story linked with it. It is interesting to note the origin of the word ‘Ao’ which is the name of the tribe. According to their traditional story they sprang up from Longtrok, which means six stones. A society or a tribe without a cultural background can be termed as a society without roots or identity. A certain group of people may claim themselves to be of superior origin but if they do not have a distinct culture of their own, it is impossible to distinguish them. The Aos are fortunately blessed with a rich cultural heritage, which is very beautiful and worth appreciating. The Aos claim that there was a written script which was inscribed on the skin of an animal and hung on a wall. But one day when the humans were away in the field, the dog pulled it down and ate it. From that day, it is believed all information was limited to memory and was communicated from one generation to another through word of mouth.

Broadly speaking, "literature" is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction.

\[261\] *Classic Literature*, http://classiclit.about.com/od/literaryterms/g/aa_whatisliter.htm
This age is called the age of science, yet we can’t deny the importance of literature in our lives. Literature is called the mirror of life. It is also called a mode of the expression of feelings and emotions. As long as human beings do have emotions and feelings, literature will be created and literature will be read. It gives a way to one's thought and also modifies and brings new dimensions to our style of thinking.

Literature represents a language or a people: culture and tradition. But, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artefact. Literature introduces us to new worlds of experience. We learn about books and literature; we enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and we may even grow and evolve through our literary journey with books.

Ultimately, we may discover meaning in literature by looking at what the author says and how he/she says it. We may interpret the author's message. In academic circles, this decoding of the text is often carried out through the use of literary theory, using mythological, sociological, psychological, historical, or other approaches.

Whatever critical paradigm we use to discuss and analyze literature, there is still an artistic quality to the works. Literature is important to us because it speaks to us, it is universal, and it affects us. Even when it is ugly, literature is beautiful.

One may ask, “What is the importance of Literature?” It is a curious and prevalent opinion that literature, like all art, is a mere play of imagination, pleasing enough, like a
new novel, but without any serious or practical importance. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Literature preserves the ideals of a people; and ideals--love, faith, duty, friendship, freedom, reverence--are the part of human life most worthy of preservation. The Greeks were a marvellous people; yet of all their mighty works we cherish only a few ideals,--ideals of beauty in perishable stone, and ideals of truth in imperishable prose and poetry. It was simply the ideals of the Greeks and Hebrews and Romans, preserved in their literature, which made them what they were, and which determined their value to future generations. Our democracy, the boast of all English-speaking nations, is a dream; not the doubtful and sometimes disheartening spectacle presented in our legislative halls, but the lovely and immortal ideal of a free and equal manhood, preserved as a most precious heritage in every great literature from the Greeks to the Anglo-Saxons. All our arts, our sciences, even our inventions are founded squarely upon ideals; for under every invention is still the dream that man may overcome the forces of nature; and the foundation of all our sciences and discoveries is the immortal dream that men "shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."**262

In a word, our whole civilization, our freedom, our progress, our homes, our religion, rest solidly upon ‘ideals’ for their foundation. Nothing but an ideal ever endures upon earth. It is therefore impossible to overestimate the practical importance of literature, which preserves these ideals from fathers to sons, while men, cities, governments, civilizations, vanish from the face of the earth.

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**262 Importance of Literature, http://classiclit.about.com/od/Experience_literature/a/The-Shell-And-The-Book_3.htm**
It is only when we remember this that we appreciate the action of the devout Mussulman, who picks up and carefully preserves every scrap of paper on which words are written, because the scrap may perchance contain the name of Allah, and the ideal is too enormously important to be neglected or lost.

The most important mode of the modernization of the tribal society was through the development of literature. The Christian missionaries transcribed the tribal dialects to writing by introducing the Roman script. This was followed by the composition of hymns, translation of prayers, books on catechism, translations from the Bible including Bible stories to be read in schools, dictionary, etc. Through the introduction of literature a new tribal identity emerged.

In Naga society traditionally each village was a state. People were confined to clan and village welfare, without having a general consciousness of the tribe. In addition to that, the tribals spoke different dialects of which the missionaries reduced several dialects to scripts which was eventually learned by the whole tribe, thereby providing a common linguistic medium and thus unity to the tribals.\textsuperscript{263}

Christianity created “a sense of tribal identity for the first time at a level higher than of a village or relatively small cluster of villages.”\textsuperscript{264}

\textsuperscript{264} \textit{Ibid.}, p.209.
This new identity was to become the basis of modern political movements, though this was not the conscious objective of the missionaries or the church leaders.\footnote{Ibid., p.209.} The consciousness of tribal community was revitalised and made a reality especially after the coming of Christianity as a force of change.

In the process, the Naga people began to view western influence as superior and more acceptable. On the contrary, it made them abandon many of their own songs, dances, festivals, dresses, religious practices and prayers. Reflecting on the Ao Naga context, Panger Imchen has rightly observed that:

\begin{quote}
Younger people laugh at those people who sing in the Ao dialect and think them as old fashion and old timers, so unfit for modern society.\footnote{Panger Imchen, \textit{Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture}, (Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi) 1993., p. 163.}
\end{quote}

Though many tribal scholars acknowledge a certain degree of the fusion or synthesis between Christianity and tribal culture, many have experienced that Christianity has not been deeply rooted in the tribal culture yet.

The ‘Christianity’ that the missionaries brought during the 18th and 19th centuries was somehow other-worldly, anthropocentric and detached from the soil. It was a spirituality mainly centred on humanity and their salvation. Acceptance of the new faith was understood as rejection of the traditional festivals, songs, dances, sacrifices, observances and ethics.
Any practice which did not conform to the Western norm of Christianity was condemned as evil and thus abandoned. Thus, the soil-centred spirituality of the tribal people was gradually replaced by the Theo-centric Christianity.

3. Technology

Today, development and progress are viewed in the Western concept of time as linear and progressive. Technological advancements have rapidly caught up with the Ao Nagas. Success is measured in management and acceleration of time and development and progress is seen in the scheme of acceleration of time. The changing understanding of time has not left the Aos unaffected. Time in Ao tribe is known as Mapang. It is determined by the position of the sun, hunger and thirst. In short, time is seen in the stream of regular activities of the day and the seasons. In fact, there is a popular saying in the Ao tradition that goes Mapang tajung ajak alangzukang (to make the most of the time and to use it well).

Technology operates with a certain understanding of time. The West has reached the top of time ladder, while the tribals are said to be still trying to climb the time ladder. In brief, technology refers to the use of tool techniques, gadgets and resources that help us control and adapt to our environment. Originating from the Greek work ‘technologia’, the term also refers to the use of machines and utensils which make our daily lives simpler.
and more organized. Technology has made our lives simple, but much dependent on it.
We can sit in a corner and get connected to the world, thus making the world a "global
community." Communicate with a person in remote area within fraction of seconds;
make a trip around the world within no time, all these are possible with the advancement
of technology, making us more dependent on its usage.

Technology is the fruit of human civilization because in technology, man’s space is
rational, organisation to dominate and assume power. Man with his rational
organisation marks the first fruit of civilization by stepping away from technology as art
and craftsmanship but letting the emergence of mechanical and artificial way of life.
Technology has a time of its own, which is based on acceleration and different from
natural time. Today’s development and progress with technology as its base, time is
accelerated. Man’s life has become mechanical and is flooded with artificial goods. Thus,
artificiality is gaining grounds in all areas of life. In contemporary times, there are too
many shades of originality and imitations that are available in plenty. Hence, life is
becoming rapidly mechanical as though it needs no human endeavour.

In present times, humans are beginning to speak and act on cloning. The originality, the
natural is left off. The useful ones will alone survive to dominate. Perhaps it is because of
man’s view of time as something scarce, therefore he needs to save, control and
manipulate it. Those who can save and control time are indeed the masters.

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268 Raimon Panikkar, Cultural Disarmament: The Way to Peace, Robert R. Barr (tran.), Kentucky:
Maybe the process of globalisation can be read in this skim of saving and manipulating by the so called advanced nations for their benefit and survival.

Technology with its accelerated time has indeed accelerated everything. Man, with the fruit of his civilization (technology), finds himself in the Age of Nuclear; Nuclear Treaty, Nuclear Warheads and Nuclear Arsenal, etc., which are new phrases of concern. There is much worry around the world of nuclear arsenal falling into the hands of terrorist, organizations and groups.

The accelerated time, although has brought lots of blessings and comfort to man’s life, yet it is killing and going to kill all, if man cannot slow down his accelerated time. There is a great need to slow down the progressive arrow of time, if man has to live a humane life. Not only man but the whole creation is tired and exhausted, it needs to relax and recreate life.

Man, with the advancement of science and technology, has now advanced so far to split the atom. The acceleration of time has caused disturbances in man, in the society, and even in the cosmos, all of which may see them-selves teetering on the brink of out-and-out catastrophe. Today, everything including human body, mechanism has accelerated causing sickness (blood pressure, heart attack, cancer, etc.) and even death. Sadly, these sicknesses are now a common disease which is found even among children.

\[269\] Ibid., p. 46.
\[270\] Ibid., p. 49.
We may also speak of social sickness such as unhealthy competition, market economy, war, terrorism, etc.

The speeding up of time has not only created individual sickness but social cancer too. It is rather interesting to note that people who are in constant tension, worry and hurry have no time to relax, are the victims of blood pressure, heart attack, cancer, etc. The treatment of such sickness is to relax. In short, it means slowing down of time which is being close to nature, to be present with one’s own being, and therefore meditation and yoga which is being aware of oneself.

There is no wonder that the advancement of technology has even caught up with the Ao Naga’s way of living. The advent of Christianity has brought a new concept of time to the Aos – perfection, salvation, the joy of waiting, fleeting moment of time. In short Christianity has introduced the Western clock time as ‘scarce’, ‘ticking off’ and ‘eluding’ in the place of timeliness. Perfection and fullness are to be attained at the dawn of eternity, however he has to make his future secure.

There is immediacy of the present in the life of the Ao Naga. Everything is seen in relation to here and now of his life – a peaceful co-existence. Perfection, completeness, etc., is not what lies beyond or what is to come, but here and now, therefore, the obligation to the neighbour, no saving or reserving for what is to come but for the now – the present. Everything is just now, the present is the answer. There is no planning whatsoever but life blooms in the mystery of the present.
It may be suggested generally that life is a flow and a spontaneous act of the present. The spontaneous act of the present generally applies to all the tribes of the Naga and perhaps, this may be the reason why the Naga is referred as a wild-hot-blooded tribe – the urgency of the present.

B. Ao Naga Culture

The Ao Nagas believed according to the traditional religion that all things are animate and all phenomena are permeated by spirit. The belief of the Naga tribal is expressed culturally. It is a myth lived out or religion in practice. Essentially in tribal religion and especially in the Ao Naga tribe, one cannot speak of religion as separate from the day-to-day living; a way of life that conducts and directs one’s life. This is a myth lived out. The Aos believe that they are part of the nature in as much as nature is part of them. Therefore he does not exploit nature – his own body. With the advancement of Christianity, tribal religion and its moral practices stand much criticized and it is on the crossroads, on the verge of disappearing once and for all. Christianity although, has grown very rapidly in the land of the Nagas, yet it has not taken roots in the culture of the Nagas. Christianity has not made the Naga to be more Naga, which, while changing his beliefs and value system has done little to understand his contexts and situations. Today, the state of Nagaland is called a Christian state, and all that is traditional and cultural and its belief system are perceived as shameful, backward, primitive (non-ancient), and have no human face.
Thus, Christianity has done little to retain or preserve let alone improve the Naga culture, as though the culture of Naga has nothing to be retained as good and valuable.

The churches in the tribal Naga areas have still a long way to incorporate the traditional and cultural symbols, festivals and practices into Christianity. Christianity should take root in the culture of Naga rather than the people taking root in Christianity and be displaced and confused. It must Christianise the culture instead of brushing it aside and considering it as unholy, superstitious, etc. While keeping the spirit of Christianity, it must also take root in the Naga culture with its cultural elements and values.

Today, it is almost impossible to speak of the Naga without reference to Christianity. It has become a new cultural lifestyle in the land of the Naga relegating Naga culture and practices as primitive and superstitious. Christianity has, doubtlessly, opened the door of modernity and education to the Naga. But it shall be too naïve to accept everything and anything that comes along with Christianity as good, and the Naga culture and tradition as bad, shameful, profane and sinful.

The Ao Naga concept of religion is understood as Yimsu. Yim means ‘Village’, Su means ‘shawl’. Thus Yimsu is something that covers the whole village and its inhabitants\(^\text{271}\). Yimsu occupies a central place of the Ao-Nagas. For them the total or whole being of a person comes under the purview of Yimsu and as such an Ao cannot conceive of the world apart from Yimsu.

To an Ao the whole universe is sacred, and thus they make no distinction between sacred and secular. This idea will be found in their God-human-world relationship, where God-human-world cannot be understood apart from the other.

They together form one comprehensive unit or whole. The role of *Yimsu* in an individual’s life is the prototype of the religion in the socio-cultural system of the Ao community. A person’s life in all its aspects is guided by his/her religious beliefs and practices. This constitutes both belief system as well as behavioural aspect of *Yimsu* because mere belief does not constitute religion, behaviour verifies religious beliefs, for belief cannot be understood nor expressed without its action exhibited in society.

The life of the Ao community can be seen more clearly from the agricultural perspective. From the day of surveying the field until the harvest, there are number of religious ceremonies with sacrifices to be performed. The concept of time is cyclic rather than progressive or linear in the Ao Naga context.

The Aos believed that to separate the human from the family of nature and the divine is to lose the meaning of life. The Aos find fullness in God only when they live in harmony with creation. This understanding is very much felt in the tribal religious traditions especially in the north east India. J.P. Mills observed that the *Yimsu* of the Aos is not a moral code but it is a system of ceremony where one may strive to do that which is lawful and right in the moral sphere.

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272 Interview Materials.
273 *Gospel Hymns in Ao Naga* (Impur: Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang, Album No. 40). One of the oldest hymns in Ao Naga tradition.
1. The Impact of Christianity

With the advent of the British, the task of humanizing the tribals became mainly the work of the Christian Missionaries. In 1869, Rev. E.W. Clark came to Sibsagar to be the missionary of Assam. In 1871, Dr. Clark wrote that in order to deliver the message of God to the Nagas, at least in a place, a work would begin. In the same year, he saw Naga traders going to and coming from Rangpur. One day, a person named Supongmeren along with some others from Dekahaimong (Molungyimsen) were seen at Rangpur, loitering around the house of the Missionary and the school building. Upon enquiry, Clark was informed that they came down in a quest for trade. Since that day, Clark was determined to go to the Naga Hills with the message of salvation and eternal life in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{275}

In October, 1871 Clark sent Godhula to Dekahaimong (Molungyimsen) in order to preach the message of God. In April 1872, Godhula, the Assamese Evangelist and his wife Lucy were sent there to stay for some time. On 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 1872, Godhula took with him nine people down to the Dikhu River, where on 11\textsuperscript{th} November 1872, Clark baptized them and they became members of the church in Sibsagar.

On 18\textsuperscript{th} December 1872, Dr. E.W. Clark made his first appearance in the hills of the Naga head-hunters. He came from Sibsagar and arrived at Molungyimchen village to explore the possibilities of his stay there. On 23\textsuperscript{rd} December, 1872, 15 people were baptized in Molungkimong Village.

This was the first foundation of a church in the soil of the Naga Hills.

A year later, the Christian group was separated from the non-Christian population of Molungyimchen and a new Christian village known by the name Molungyimsen was founded miles to the north of the old village, and it became the centre of the Christian Mission activities for the time being. Dr. Clark, a highly educated man, walked up the jungle path of the hills with a firm conviction and determination. In those days, head-hunting was held in high esteem by the Nagas, as an act of glory and the villages were separated by thick forests, which were infested by wild animals. One can well imagine the sufferings of the first white man, carrying his bundle of clothes on his back, as he travelled from place to place in the midst of all the rough treatments of the jungle dwellers and the wild beasts.\footnote{276 Ibid., p. 193.}

Dr. Clark had also started an informal school in Molungyimsen village, with the help of Godhula Babu. Later in 1882, the missionary came to Mopungchukit village to stay there and started another school on Impur. Thus the system of modern education emerged in the Naga Hills along with Christianity by the American Baptist Missionary, Dr. E.W. Clark. The first was established at Molungyimsen and then at Impur in 1882. The missionary schools were later changed to two separate schools, one for boys and another for girls. In 1885, the mission schools were visited by one Mr. W.S. Clark, and the deputy commissioner of Sibsagar district of Assam. He left the following note: ‘I visited Mr. Clark’s boys’ and girls’ school which are yet thinly attended.
Education, however, had evidently commenced and the children read with fluency their Naga Primer and other first books and song of reducing the language to a written form and to translate the New Testament and to compile a dictionary.”

In the beginning there was some opposition from the local people to missionary activities but gradually, they learned the value of education and so started helping the missionaries with materials and labour for construction of school buildings. They also donated land for the schools. English script was used for writing the Naga language.

Gradually, some more schools were opened and by 1893, there were eighty days schools in the Ao area, where 120 students on the average attended daily. By 1895, a total of 200 students were receiving education. It was all primary education, but it helped the people greatly to write their own language in the English script.

Gradually, the government also started taking interest and started giving grants-in-aid. A substantial source of income for managing these schools was the contribution of private individuals i.e. the local people and a good amount came from the Christian missions.

Teachers in the mission schools were Assamese and the Ao Nagas. The mission school at Impur gradually became the centre of education not only for the Aos but for the other tribes also. People from the neighbouring tribes started coming to the schools. Thus, we see that in the Naga Hills, education first started in the Ao area and from there it spread to other tribes and thus converted people to Christianity. The Impur Mission Centre became the centre for Sema, Lotha, Chang, Konyak and many other tribes.277

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277 Ibid., pp. 193-194.
In the attempt to establish Christianity among the Aos, there was lamentable destruction to valuable ancient traditions, customs and moral values. One of the terrible things in the Ao community, prior to the advents of Christianity, was continual warfare and dreadful inter-village feuds among the Ao Nagas. The British government tried to subdue the Nagas into becoming a part of their glorious empire, but with no success, rather, their brave soldiers fell victim to Naga warriors. The British were uncertain of their victory while the Nagas were not yet decided whether to defend their sovereignty or bow before the white man’s aggression. The Nagas suspected their freedom would be lost to the power of the British army.

2. Christianity - The Agent of Change in Ao Naga society

Both secular and religious historians have observed that when a new philosophy of life is introduced to a foreign culture, both negative and positive changes have to take place. This has been particularly true in the spread of Christianity since the early church. When Christianity was brought to the Aos and began to work for a better future, reactions acceptance, submission, rejection, division and change were daily experiences throughout the country. The Aos had their own age long traditionally set mind conditioned by their limited world-view. Bruce J. Nicholls writes that the Gospel is never proclaimed to man in a vacuum.278

It would be a one sided view if all the changes and progress are attributed to Christian missionaries. Rather, the major role of change was played by the British ruler at the most crucial period of its beginning. One of the main reasons for easy penetration of the Gospel into Ao Naga community was that, no influence existed from other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Sikhism, nor were there any influence from other Indian ethnic groups and philosophies. The soil was fresh, people pure and solidly of one different culture.

Christianity and education go hand in hand. Without schools, church planting would be almost a failure in the Ao society. The changes and the progress made by Christianity to the Aos are tremendous on individual, social and religious levels. They found that their old faith was not the ultimate goal in a search for truth. Dr. Sevilie Iralu, a retired Naga medical officer, said “if Christianity had not come to the Nagas, things would be entirely different. Life, individually and collectively, would be different.”

Human life which ended on the sharp end of daos was reconciled in the new fellowship of the church. Fear of raids, mass killings, distrust and constant restlessness faded and a new humanity was established. Missionaries not only preached but taught hygiene, temperance from heavy drinks and chewing beetle nut. This brought a more clean life, a more meaningful and longevity to life.

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279 Philip, Baptist Churches, pp. 200-201.
280 Dao – a large chopping knife used by the Naga tribes for cutting woods, used as weapon in war and head-hunting, as agricultural implements, and some carpentry tools for wood carving and all purpose for cutting.
A dreaded invader was the epidemic diseases which claimed lives and the superstitions which followed, disappeared with the introduction of modern medicines and proper methods of hygiene.

Inter-village feuds, warfare and enmity were replaced by peace and good will. Once the Ao Nagas were head-hunters, now they are soul-searchers with the same spirit of adventure. The plainsmen considered the Nagas to be wild, uncivilised savages, but they now have a unique social status in the world and the idea is reversed. If anyone makes an impartial judgement, he would admit that Christianity was the agent for change.

The moral values and standards also have improved to a larger extent. Education is highly valued and a rapid increase in literacy is observed. Their fatalistic attitude towards life has turned to be a life of faith and hope. Fear of spirits of darkness has vanished. A new spiritual and physical freedom overwhelms Ao community life. Ao church, being the pioneer and guardian church today in Nagaland, has the greatest contribution towards church growth and missionary vision in the state. Because of the light of the Gospel, they are brought to the international arena of Christian world as well as the secular world. Old cultural behaviour, social norms and religious practices have been changed. Christianity opened the eyes of the Nagas to a new meaning for freedom and liberty which also ultimately gave birth to Naga nationalism and their freedom movement.

A renowned scholar, M. Horam represents the other opinion who thinks that the missionaries were responsible for the destruction of Ao culture. He says,
The missionaries have been the offenders in suppressing the Naga culture as it finds expression in their haunting songs and their energetic and colourful dances....forbidding dancing and drinking of even the mildest rice beer led to many villages splitting up into two.\textsuperscript{281}

In short, Christianity implanted the civilization with a considerable degree of resonance not only to the Naga life but also far-reaching moral crusade to change the Naga personality in the direction of self-sacrifice and service for humanity.

However, it should be admitted that missionaries had some weaknesses. They thought that every ancient culture was devilish with no exception. This was due to their inability to study the meaning and value system behind the Ao cultural behaviour. This led to undermining of ancient cultural features that resulted in disputes, hostility and misunderstanding.

M. Alemchiba observes,

\textit{They (Christian missionaries) felt every ceremony should be abolished....the tendency was to abolish abruptly the old things and substitute individualism for the strong community feeling....the result was a conflict not necessarily a conflict of arms but of culture.}\textsuperscript{282}

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\textsuperscript{282} Alemchiba, \textit{Highlander}, Vol.4, No. 1 & 2., p. 3.
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The reasons for attempts to abolish the ancient cultural features were made on the grounds that most of them were connected with old religious practices. For instance, to celebrate Moatsu (Ao festival) by a Christian in those early stages was to go back to their old way of life. They were premature in judgement of good from bad, on the one hand, and on the other, missionaries were unable to differentiate between what was to be abolished and what was to be retained. For Aos, there was no difference between sacred and profane. Both the foreign missionaries and the natives could not examine deeply what was connected with the old practices and what were customary and a traditional part of life. Therefore, even before the missionaries left the country in 1955, there seems to have been a tendency among Christians to think that anything that was Western was good and anything Ao was satanic. This attitude resulted in danger of total rejection of all Ao culture and a copying of Western culture in the name of Christianity.

3. Western culture and Ao Naga society

It is difficult to draw a line between the Western culture and Eastern culture today. The fashion of dress, music, art, science, technology, etc. comes mostly from the West. This aspect of culture has become, not Western, but of universal culture in which the West has a tremendous impact on the world. Rejecting this for the sake of defending one’s own culture makes no sense at all. Without following this trend those areas of society would remain static and irrelevant.

The problem with the Ao churches and society was that, they were confused and unable to separate the Christianity from what is ‘Western culture’.

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There was a common norm that Christianity meant ‘Western people’. The Aos felt that white people were angelic, heavenly and they were never critical. It is said that, when Dr. Clark came to Mangmetong village in 1904, women and children used to touch even his urine and saliva curious to feel what it would be like. Under such circumstances, exploitation was not uncommon by Westerners. If the modern education system is accepted as Western in style, then the Aos have the highest gratitude to Western culture. It was the missionaries along with the British government who introduced this system of progress.\

The British left in 1947 and the American Missionaries in 1955. But today, elderly people recall their smart days with the white men in schools, church centres and in their bungalows, and those who happen to have lived with them take pride in reminding their children how they enjoyed their company. The old-folk always have a proud story about the British days. Thus, the moral impact of the West is still strongly felt. Those who lived with the white proved to be more disciplined than the younger generations in all aspects of life. Doubtless, there have been uncountable good impacts of Western culture.

Among intellectuals, there is a group of people who blame outright Western people for the destruction of Ao culture. One of the papers read at the 16th Ao Theological Conference in 1980 states:

Missionaries did many good things for the Aos. But they did some bad things too. They created destruction in social and cultural lives of Aos….they failed to differentiate the social-cultural aspect and religious

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aspect of the life and culture of the Aos. Along with the worship of Satan, they buried our culture....because the Ao Christians regarded the Ao culture as a sin. They (missionaries) tried to impact Christianity in American culture. This is the first wound that disintegrates our culture. Aos are suffering from this wound till today without finding a healing balm.²⁸⁴

Another saddening thing is the subsequent distortion of Ao language. English songs have completely replaced Ao in church services, youth gatherings, conferences and social events. Whether the congregation understands it or not, the song is in English, for, an Ao feels it a shame to sing in Ao in church. Younger people laugh at those who sing in Ao dialect and think of them as old-fashioned and old-timers, so unfit for modern society. This has already resulted in the destruction of the Ao dialect even among the Ao themselves. The younger preachers preach in a mixed dialect of Ao-English, which makes no sense to uneducated people. On the contrary a Westerner today would feel quite at home to attend Sunday worship in an Ao church.

The church often, thus, becomes an exhibition theatre for dress, fashion and cosmetics. The younger generations are so westernised that the youth convention and camps look almost like a Western concert with Western musical instruments. There is real danger of complete loss of Ao traditional music and songs.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 162.
The younger generation even go to the extent of ignoring their parents or elders or any lover of Ao culture by saying that they are modern people and the latter are old-fashioned. M. Horam in his lamenting tune writes:

*One can also find the beginnings of the defiance of parental authority and rejection of their advice as old-fashioned, but mostly among the modern homes impatiently dismissing their parents with the withering comments: “you don’t know anything”, “you are too old fashioned.” These young people tend to blame all family discord on the generation gap. The results are unhappiness in the families.*

This is a distortion of modernization, a misconception of Western culture for one’s own advantage and easy going life. However, this is the prevailing reality not only in the Ao community but in all Naga society and elsewhere around the world. A civilised developing country takes pride in a high standard of living. *Nagas* are yet to attain such a standard in the modern economic sense. The *Aos* and the other *Nagas* are civilized and cultured in their own way. More than a generation ago *Nagas* could claim to be a unique country where there were no police, no prison, thieves, brothels, dancing halls, no liquor dens or gambling grotto, no beggars; and murder and theft very rare. Today *Nagas* admit to their shame this claim no longer holds good.

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Much has been changed; pros and cons, with a critical analysis, of impact of Christianity and Western culture on the Ao have been discussed. Present day problems are caused by a distortion of modernisation or Western culture by younger generation who are the products of the in-between cultures.

C. Religious Diffusion and Moral Cross-Cultural Dialogue

For many people, religion, more than any other cultural trait, points out who they are and how do they understand the world around them. Like language, religion confers identity. Religion determines the lives and behaviour of billions of people worldwide. Because religion is tied to all aspects of human culture and social systems, studying the geography of religion can help us to understand everything from population growth, to international politics, to the design and structure of cities. In many parts of the world, especially in non-Western areas, religion is such a vital part of culture that it practically constitutes the culture. Thus it becomes difficult to define exactly what a religion is, because religion manifests itself in so many different ways.

In some of the more secular societies, religion - at least in an organized form - has become less significant in the lives of many people. In many societies in Africa and Asia, religious doctrine exerts tight control over much of the behaviour of the people, through ritual and practice and even the orientation of the sleeping body at night. Even where religion is less dominant, its expression is still evident in many practices and beliefs.287

287 *Religion: Origins and Diffusion* - Pine Crest School
teacherweb.flt.pinecrest.edu/snyderd/MWH/.../3%20-%20Religion.pdf...
Similarly, the Ao Naga society was such that the traditional religion played a vital role and everything centred on it until the advent of the Christian missionaries. With the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century the Ao Naga tribe were the earliest converts to Christianity among the other Naga tribes. Many became Christians in the 1870s. Today, Aos are almost 100 percent Christians. Along with Christianity, a new world-view was brought to the Naga tribals. The Christian missionaries brought about the greatest revolution in the history of the Nagas, particularly the Ao Naga tribe.

1. Ao Naga Religious Diffusion

When we observe the way of life of the Ao Nagas, the emergence of Christianity has a strong effect on their culture. As a result of which the whole system of life has been changed in the process of development due to diffusion, accumulation, adoption and assimilation of the Western ideology and beliefs. The fundamental change has occurred in the shifting of life from head-hunting to peaceful relationship and disappearance of the Feast of Merit. The life of the Ao Nagas centred on these two practices.

In the past, the Nagas never had a unified system of administration and their past history had been a long story of hostility to one another. Every Naga village had been a republic, having its own popular village Government, the council of the village even today is represented by every clan of the village. This council was the Parliament of the village. Under the village Government, every citizen enjoys political stability, social justice, and religious freedom. All men were equal. Men and women enjoyed equal social status and
no majority or minority problem existed. Economically they were self-sufficient, beggars were unknown. Every family lived in the village on their own rights, possessed a house, built on their own land and cultivated on their own land. They paid no land revenue, no property tax, no wine tax and no income tax. The rivers, the forest and the woodland belonged to the people for free exploitation. The cases of theft, if any, were exceedingly rare. There was no police, no armed forces, no jails and no prison. No family had ever been left by their fellowmen to the mercy of circumstances. Such were the societies where the Nagas and the Aos in particular, lived till they came in contact with the so called civilized world.

But in a rapidly changing world, they could not remain static. Their culture, however vigorous and colourful, gradually gave way before the impact of one or the other type of modern civilization. The Nagas became conscious of the changes and rose to the occasion. They realised that their interest and outlook should go beyond the limits of their village.288

In fact nothing has really been recorded in written, and everything that we know today is what has been handed down to us through oral narration from our forefathers. The oral tradition plays the all-important role in defining good citizenship and maintaining a harmonious social fabric because all the subtleties of social structure and interaction are encoded in the tradition.

288 A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland, (Naga Institute of Culture, Kohima, Nagaland, 1970)., p. 162.
To date back to history, among the Naga tribes, the Aos were the most privileged ones and the most advanced tribe because the White rulers first came and spread Christianity in these parts of the Nagas. The Christian missionaries first established their stronghold on the Ao areas making Impur as their Mission Centre. Though the entry of Christianity had its own drawbacks, it also brought with it its own good package for the people like education, which brought many of the Nagas from darkness to light. But it is sad that no such literary work of recognition has been produced.

No nation can maintain its greatness by disowning its roots, values and legacy. Like other traditional societies, the Ao Nagas also possess rich tradition, value system, culture and heritage. For over a period of time immense distortions have crept into the Ao Naga tradition. The transition of social elements began when the “world” made contact with the Ao Nagas during British colonial expansion in the Indo-Burma frontier (Myanmar). The introduction of Western education and Christian faith brought tremendous changes in the “Ao Naga way of life” and belief system. These two doctrines came along with Western ideas, image and lifestyles. It was in a way, a turning point in the history where the Ao Naga confronted with the reality of a much bigger world. Eventually, but inevitably, they could not ignore the circumstance and came to embrace it. With that the old Ao Naga “way of life” came to wear away consequently.

Indeed, as a result of rapid growth of education and the influence of Christianity, there was a drastic shift in socio-cultural system. The modern education improved the Ao Naga livelihood and health status, and diversified economic system. The spread of Christianity brought both positive and negative impact in the Ao Naga society.
The changes include belief system, mind-set and attitudes. However, this new faith virtually wears the traditional foundation like dance, folk songs, customs, practices and stories. The new religion based on church system brought radical changes in the social practices (also the changes helped in the emergence of some sort of socio-religious institution and unified platform). Christianity re-modelled the Ao Naga tradition by abolishing feast of merit, ceremonies and rituality. The feast of merit, disapproved by the missionaries, in fact, has important social and economic functions. Given feast of merit is a social reciprocal system manifesting generosity, compassion and concern to the community. Moreover, such practices enhance social cohesiveness and communitarian feelings.

With the advent of Christianity, many changes have taken place in the lifestyle of the Ao Nagas such as cooking systems, food items, patterns of house-building and house decoration, matters relating to personal hygiene and community health awareness, enamel and plastic mugs and plates have been introduced in the place of the old bamboo cups and wooden plates. Aluminium and stainless steel have taken the place of earthen pots. A wide accessibility of market and improved communication have led to the import of all up to date cosmetics and outfit for females, and t-shirts, neck tie, suits, jeans and jackets for males have replaced the traditional dresses. The traditional head gears, armlets, bead necklaces, earrings, bracelets have generally become pieces of the past and for special occasions like festivals. With the coming of Christianity, the land of the Aos has been covered with churches and schools even in the remote rural areas.
In the process of change, modernization and westernization, the traditional culture of the Aos is rapidly disappearing. However, the conservative nature of the Aos is that, they will never lose completely their rich culture, heritage and superstition.²⁸⁹

Modernity is nothing to do with a mere base of explicit exponential growth of urbanisation and industrialisation but an attitude of equality with respect for the other. Understanding one’s own culture would give the true concept of modernity and personality. Both the Ao Naga tradition and modern outlook can co-exist and supplement each other. In other words, it means to contextualise and adapt in Ao Naga way of life. It is a matter of adoption and adjustment, that is, to traditionalise the modernization process or modernize the tradition. The most fundamental thing to keep in mind is that an essence of adoption to an extent of desirable perspective is depending on the need of a society.

Today, the majority of the Ao Nagas have adopted Christianity. Along with it, rapid spread of Western education and the impact of modern Western standards have made deep inroads into the traditional Ao Naga beliefs and customs. However, the Ao Nagas are a tradition-loving people, and a more or less distinctive Ao Naga way of life is still being maintained.


Globalisation has transformed the whole modern world beyond recognition through the flow of technologies, capital, goods, recession, values, knowledge and people. It is profoundly manifested in various forms of social activity including economic, political and cultural life\(^{290}\) and has led to widening, deepening, and spreading of worldwide interconnectedness\(^{291}\). However, our rapidly changing world, characterised by this intensive globalisation, is filled with deep-rooted inequality\(^{292}\) and extreme cultural differences. There are some practices that are morally acceptable in some cultures but condemned in others, such as infanticide, genocide, polygamy, racism, sexism, or torture. Such differences in moral practices across cultures have led to the question whether there are any universal moral principles or whether morality is merely dependent on the particular culture. It is not generally enough to refer to the doctrines of international law and the universal declarations of human rights when different cultures, and their particular moral and value systems clash. But how do we reason across different cultures, religions, ethnicity, gender, historical experience, class and geo-political locations? Is there a possibility of a global ethics, offering us tools for cross-cultural moral judgments and provide answers of how to overcome conflict that inevitably arises when very different cultural norms, values and practices clash?


\(^{292}\) Inequalities particular experienced by women and girls
For the last one hundred years, the social and religious life of the Aos has been under tremendous challenge from many quarters such as materialism, consumerism, injustice, political party spirit, revival of clanism, revival of culture and the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Though traditional values such as hospitality, gentleness, religious devotion, hard work, contentment with what one has, good family life, honesty, esteem for rulers and elders and the spontaneous awareness of God’s (Tsungrem) presence in all the activity of life are still found among the elderly folks in the villages, the younger generation is slowly giving way to coldness, strangeness, harshness, lack of interest in religious life, absence of sense of responsibility, desire for more material things without hard work, discontentment with what one has, disharmony, dishonesty and injustice. The gracious spirit of hospitality and trust is slowly giving way to mistrust and pride.²⁹³

On the level of community moral values, Nagas lived a communitarian way of life based on their communitarian moral principles. For instance, Ao-Nagas called this community moral principle Sobaliba. The principle of Sobaliba is a code of social morality such as respect for elders, help for the needy, dignity of labour, unselfishness, honesty, politeness, cheerfulness, charitable character, etc. Sobaliba is a life virtue, a living for the best of the other person and for the community; thereby individual concerns become secondary. Thus, a person realizes nobility and virtue in life by becoming a person of Sobaliba. Instead of teaching the Nagas to do away their native communitarian culture and moral principle, it would have been more fruitful in the Naga evolution of Christian morality when Christ would have been portrayed as a man of Sobaliba.

Christian salvation was meant to be an individual affair, and this view gave rise to the present chronic social disease of Naga individualism that is hampering Naga communitarian morals in Naga society. Besides physical, military, economic and political violence, there is also such a thing as cultural violence. Cultural violence can affect peoples’ identity formation. Identity formation is not found only in ideas or in printed texts but in the lived experience of a historically conditioned group of people. In this sense we may argue that Christianity, more or less, exterminated the native’s identity. For many decades Christianity was for the Nagas a closed Western cultural object that had no room to accommodate the native’s culture. A new, but warped, Naga identity began to emerge from this exclusivist notion, resulting in Naga communitarian moral decadence, creating a moral dilemma for the natives.  

The Aos have been receptive to foreign influences of every kind including that of religion for almost a century now. Foreign ideas are valued more highly than the local ideas. As a result, the Ao traditional religious life and cultural value have undergone transformation continually and more rapidly than in the neighbouring states. A startling example is in the area of sexual mores. About twenty-five years ago, modesty was esteemed highly in the Ao society. Any display of affection between men and women in public was frowned upon. Today it is no longer so.

During the process of proselytization many Ao Naga customs and culture have been abandoned even burnt and destroyed beyond repair. Subsequently, many cultural practices have become Christian taboos portraying as of ‘sin’ thing. Consumption of

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294 Bendangjungshi, Confessing Christ in the Naga Context, (Munster: Lit verlag, 2011), pp.43-44.
traditional drinks is banned among the Baptist denomination. The traditional festivals are abandoned, folk songs and dances are dying (taking over by hymn), traditional games is no more popular (chess, carom, card, etc., is coming in). The Aos Nagas have always maintained a close affinity with their traditions and customs. The changes brought by Christianity and modernisation have affected the social fabric of Ao culture. One of the Ao traditional songs,

*Moatsu benjong nung matener nebur tak tenloktsuba* (a song sung for those who did not attend the *Moatsu* festival):

*Moatsu rorgnung matenerbo, (Those who fail to attend Moatsu festival)*

*Yimku lima masoa (Are better off not being born)*

*O meri kiyong alirje, Oh rongjen alini (O, those who dwell in isolation)*

*Rongjen alini (Shall feel so forlon) (Kongshir Ken 2007: 25).*

The above song throws light on the *Moatsu* festival, which is an important event besides the *Tsungremmong* festival.

The conversion created a “vacuum” between the Ao Naga traditions and the Christian faith. And it is not filled sufficiently by the early missionaries and educated Ao Nagas. Much to be comprehended is that this vacuum would later threaten the Ao Naga identity and social solidarity. In this context, it cannot be claimed that the Nagas are totally losing their traditional authoritarianism.
Many dramatic transformations have been taking place in the Ao society in term of qualitative and quantitative statistical outputs. But, what is tragic is the ignorance of the rich tradition. The traditional “treasures” are not fully utilized for the advantage of the community. The treasures like arts, culture, ethic and indigenous knowledge system are threatened in the midst of what is called modernization influence. Here, another “vacuum” is created between the Ao Naga tradition and modernity. The modernization process is overwhelmed with Western ideas, image and concept. At this trend, exert of external pressure is so strong which sweeps the treasures at the threshold of losing faces. Much is seen in the present situation. The entertainments too are shifting more towards satellite culture and less space is given to traditional entertainments (festivals, songs and dances and leisure). These make vacuum in the Ao Naga cultural ethos.\(^{296}\)

For about a hundred years now, the Ao church has been playing an important role in shaping the Ao way of life. The church has been totally under local leadership, self-supporting and self-propagating, for the last thirty years. Yet by and large, it is a timid church. It fails to raise a prophetic voice against injustice and corruption as demanded by the Gospel. The principle cause is that it has deliberately distanced itself from the traditional Ao way of life. Though Christianity and Western culture have made some positive impact on the life of the Aos, they have also caused some negative impacts. The outright denunciation of the traditional beliefs and practices as altogether things of devils has made traditional religion a taboo in the minds of the early converts.

\(^{296}\) U A Shimrat, *Nagas in Social Dilemma*

http://classic.kanglaonline.com/index.php?template=kshow&kid=333&Idoc_Session=1b22ddd2873ef8925aed15a52b69a133
In spite of the fact that the early Christians have incorporated many social and religious elements into the church activities by baptising them, the church considers each faith superior to that of the traditional religion.\textsuperscript{297}

In the dominant “catch-up” the sole criterion of judging human society is economic. It undermines the cultural and moral aspects of human society and projects the image of Western society as the goal of civilization. When this catch-up theory is applied to human society, the logic is very clear. The more we are developed industrially, the higher we are up the ladder. The tribal people are industrially backward and therefore are considered inferior. The tribal religion and culture are looked down. Anything that does not conform to the Western world-view is “devilish, irrational, inhuman, inferior, backward, primitive” and so forth. This prejudice is inevitable since the Western system of thought is largely based on anthro-progressive interpretation of history. This philosophy of history declares that human development is rectilinear and progressive and the mind tends necessarily towards greater and greater rationality and complexity. It is an unending process. Since the tribal religion and culture are centred on the creation, their religion is described as the earliest stage of religious consciousness. That is why the tribal religion has been designated by the colonizers, missionaries, students of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, comparative religion and theology as a religion without any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality. Thus, the tribal religion has been designated as animism and primitive.

\textsuperscript{297} Ibid., p. 3.
The tribals now find themselves in a deep crisis of survival because of the environmental degradation. The natural resources like land, sea and forest which were life supportive for centuries are now being depleted. The ambitious construction of big dams, hydro-electrical projects, etc. has led to the displacement of tribal people in different parts of India by divesting them of their land in an effort to perpetuate the so called developmental indexes. The tribals who are already powerless and exploited are further reduced to powerlessness and bondage. Being impoverished and disposed, people flee in large numbers to the cities and the towns to eke out their existence around slums and shanties in abject poverty and misery. The simple villagers who cannot afford a high level of consumption are looked down upon as being uncivilized and unworthy people. Since the majority of the tribals live in villages, they are looked down on as being an uncivilized, uncultured and primitive people.298

With the rapid acceptance of Christianity, modernity has affected the whole social fabric of Ao tribal life and bringing them into different situation is entirely unknown in the traditional life. Many are forced to leave their homes, relatives and villages to go and work in towns, offices, industries and so forth. This sudden detachment from the land to which people are mystically bound, and the experience of being placed in situations where corporate existence has no meaning, have produced, so to speak, the humanized individuals. The individuals are severed, cut off, pulled out and separated from corporate personality, customs and traditional solidarity.

Many people live as individual, but do not exist as corporate humanity as they did before. The rapid change of phase has created an individualistic way of living among the people.

The changing understanding of time has not left the Ao life unaffected. Today, obligation to the other – spontaneous act is no more a priority but insuring for the future. With the Western notion of insurance and saving for what is to come, selfishness and greed are on the rise among the Aos as they have to make their future secure. We see and witness the breaking down of the communitarian life and obligation to the needy on the one hand and on the other, marking the entry and rise of insurance, creating narrow domestic walls as though the other is an alien, not a subject but an object.

The head-hunters and the days of head-hunting are far gone to the land of history. Nevertheless, the Aos are already on the threshold of creating a new history for themselves with killing, murder and of course not forgetting, the imposition of Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), in their land by the Government of India, where killing by Armed Forces is justified and cannot be appealed to the court whatsoever is.  

The land of the Nagas is even subjected to as ‘Disturbed Area’ and harmony is still to be found in their land. Where has the value of Christian charity, love, peace and contentment gone? Can Christianity answer to this new ills and problems of the Naga without considering their culture seriously but closing their eyes to reality and cultural elements and see it as in need of conversion and salvation?

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299 Regulation No. 7 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Regulation 1958 states, "No prosecution, suit or other proceedings shall lie in any court of law against any officers of the Armed Forces in respect of anything done…when this regulation was in force." Cf., Wetshokhrolo Lasuh (ed.), The Naga Chronicle., p. 157.
Religion must make people feel at home – at ease with oneself and others for which religion must be planted in the culture of the people because any society, to be proper and ethical, cannot see religion as another scheme of practices but must see and treat it as a way of life that conducts its life. A new Christology (a new understanding of Christ and Christian way of living) should concern with the culture of the Aos so that religion does not merely become a blind belief but a way of life.

The dominant Christian culture needs to consider the Ao Naga culture of the earthly dimension and live the present (here and now) so that the Christian followers may feel at home and live and celebrate his daily life and not merely speculating the joy to come after this earthly misery and toil. Has Christianity alone has all that is good? Can Christianity make an Ao one without losing his essence of being an Ao? Whatsoever the concern may be, an Ao must ask himself “Am i an Ao first or a Christian first?” Perhaps, when he is able to answer this question, he may find a solution to some of the problems that confront him.