CHAPTER - 11.
CHAPTER II

There is an ordered system of beliefs and ideas in all religions. Religious behaviours become meaningful when these are viewed as the expression of the beliefs and the ideas. Religious behaviours are expressed in forms of symbols and rituals that influence the individual and the social life showing one's attitude towards the world of nature and fellow beings. Ceremonies and rituals which are the expression of belief and ideas can be better understood after we have considered the belief system. On this assumption, I will undertake a description of the beliefs of the Ao Nagas with the hope that such an account would help in understanding the influence and the role of such beliefs in their day to day life.

The social and cultural organization set up of the Aos is depicted in their idea of God.
As Madhakrishnan remarked, "Our mental pictures of God are as varied as we are". Ao believe in many gods with their own jurisdiction. My attempt is not to arrange the Ao Naga conception of God in the form of an hierarchical order as lower or higher gods nor am I committed to reduce the Ao Naga conception of religion to some simplistic concept like polytheism, pantheism and other forms of theism. I wish to recreate in this chapter without any prejudice, as far as possible, the world view of the Ao Nagas as inherent in their religion.

Every aspect of the Ao Naga's world is sacred. For the life on this earth there is God the creator called 'Liinba' (Earth Walker), for the world beyond the living there is God the judge called 'Kayutsana' and there is the creator or giver of life and dispenser of fate, the God of heaven called 'Lanakitsana'. Apart
from these gods there are numerous deities (forces) within the world inhabiting different objects and places which are faced with an attitude of humility and awe.

'Lijaba' is the creator of this earth. He is not the creator of animals and human beings. He is called the God of this earth. He bestows blessings and inflicts punishments. He is regarded as having the greatest influence upon the earth and its natural forces. A yearly ceremony is held in his honour offering sacrifices and prayers for blessings. This is the most serious one of all ceremonies. At the violation of the rules and rites of this ceremony another secondary sacrifice will be offered to avert the impending danger as a result of the transgression of the sacrifice rules. The creator God receives greater social consideration and ritual attention. Apart from the ceremony held in honour of 'Lijaba', in all
ceremonies blessing is evoked addressing him as 'Ali Tsungrem' (God of the earth). Aos are agriculturists, so blessing received for better crops is regarded to be the most important one. All ceremonies and sacrifices relating to cultivation are attributed to 'Lijaba', the creator of the earth. He is mainly responsible for agricultural prosperity.

'Mayutsung' is the God of the next world. He is the Judge. He is regarded as the King of the dead. He judges everyone according to one's deeds here on earth. He is a silent spectator of life, ready to judge, and he does not interfere in this present life and activities. When a person dies the soul enters the 'Amuyim' (Death Village) through the gate of 'Mayutsung'. He will punish severely those who do not live a good moral life acceptable to the social customs and norms here on earth. Of all the crimes the Aos considered theft to be the most serious one. In their custom the punishment
For committing theft is the greatest. A thief is a social outcast in the Ao society. The village authority will drive such a person out of the village. "Muyutsung" is also very particularly against the sin of committing theft. Cases of theft were very rare in the traditional Ao Naga society. Next sin that the Judge is concerned about is adultery, fornication and pride. Because of the belief that "Muyutsung" demands purity, honesty and humility, Aos had a high standard of moral life. As I have mentioned earlier the observation of certain outsiders that the religion of the Ao Nagas is not a moral code is far from the truth with the Aos. It was believed that everybody's sin will be revealed at the court of the 'Muyutsung': There a sinner will be put to shame before the Judge and seeing by all those who have gone there before.

"...... if he had been a thief ....... his load will give him trouble. For everything he has ever stolen will be in it and try as he will pack them at the bottom,
these proofs of his guilt keep working up to the top of his load where no one can fail to see them. Meanwhile Muyutsung watches and judges Honest men he calls into his house and sends straight through it into the village of dead"1.

It is believed that such scenes of shame will be witnessed by all those who have gone there before. Thus the concept of the God of the Judge played a great role conducive to social integration and the stability of the Ao society.

'Muyutsung' demands from everyone a recognition that riches and blessings are from God alone. A myth goes that a certain man called 'Sawo' was very rich. He celebrated several feasts of merit attaining the highest position as a rich man. He died and went to 'Asuyim' with all the riches and glory of the

merit be had earned. While approaching 'Muyutsung's court he was asked by the Judge to tell Him with whose power he could bring so many achievements from the land of the living. Sawo replied that it was by his own effort that he had prospered so well in the land of the living. 'Muyutsung' was not happy with him because of his proud reply and he was sent back to the land of the living again. He started a new life in extreme poverty. After living a very hard life he died and on his funeral ceremony there was not a single livestock to kill to accompany him to the land of the dead.* At last 'Muyutsung' felt pity on him and sent a small bird for the occasion thus his funeral ceremony was performed by the priest by killing that bird. And when Sawo reached

*Aos believe that animals have souls and when a person dies an animal will be killed to accompany his soul on journey to the land of the dead, so that he may not feel lonely.
the Muutsaung's court for the second time, he came empty handed. Muutsaung asked him about his previous riches and glory and Sawo was very much ashamed realising his folly and vain glory.

"Lonskitaungha" is the king of heaven. He is also called "Anungha" (Heaven Chief). He is the one who determines life, birth, death and predeterminates the fate of every human being. In every public ceremony prayers are offered to him evoking his blessings. Every individual performs a special sacrifice to him occasionally praying for a long and prosperous life. "Lonskitaungha" and "Liishha" receive greater attention from the Aos. "Muutsaung" is to be faced only after death, and so he receives no offering nor sacrifices though his influence is greatest in the moral and social life of the people. Though every aspect of the Ao Nagas' world is sacred,
matters pertaining to human affairs are considered and attended more readily than matters pertaining to the other world. This has become one of the reasons for the outsiders to label Ao Naga religion as animism.

'Numerous' Dieties, called 'Tsungrem' (Gods) residing in certain rocks, mountains, rivers and places are worshipped most. According to the Ao, there are certain recognised boulders and mountains to which gods yearly sacrifices are made seeking their favour for prosperity and protection. They are regarded as powerful gods. If they are provoked to anger they may punish men. The mountains and the boulders are concrete objects which become the media of the divine. Anyone who trifles with them will face some misfortunes, because of the anger of the 'Tsungrem' (god) of that place. Like in the religious ceremonies of the organised religions;
the religious power gets symbolised in particular objects, say a book, a stone, a cross and so on. The same is true in case of the Ao Naga religion. For instance, there is a boulder about 70 k.m. away from the district headquarter (Mokokchung Town) between two villages (Dibuiia and Waromung). There is a divine power residing in the boulder. The existence and reality of the divine power has been proved on many occasions. Few years back some government officials wanted to have boulder photographed but everytime the camera was ready a sudden storm or a gush of wind would disturb or a shadow of cloud would hinder it being photographed. Such boulders possess certain divine powers bearing directly upon the people. They worship and trust such divinities as refuge and defender in times of war and distress. Even a prejudiced mind like J.P. Mills gives an account of the ancidents:

"......boys sleeping in the 'murong' (boys dormitory).........would be knocked off
their sleeping benches, it is said, by invisible hands, or even carried bodily outside the village. Animals tied up for sacrifice too, would be loosed. The spirit of the stone would appear in a dream who perform the annual sacrifice and give useful informations about the future. There the converts showed their christian zeal by climbing on the top of the boulder and using the top of it as latrine. The ringleader was one Cheptakyangba (personal name) of Yachang (Village), for the next six months he was insane and took on his abode under the corpse-platforms in his village.

Regarding another boulder he wrote:

"Sometimes it would turn into two stones, which were regarded as husband and wife, while at other times it would disappear altogether."

Offering of sacrifices and worship of these boulders resulted in victory over enemies during

2 Ibid p.218.
"Kopungchuket" and Mongsenyimti (two villages) waged war. The latter were led by a woman, invisible to them but visible to the enemies, who fled leaving twelve heads behind. The ghostly woman (for no woman goes to the battle) disappeared but no one doubted that she was the 'Tsungrem' of 'Sitilung' (elephant stone) come to assist her worshippers.

Such a powerful boulder was near Impur (The Christian Mission Centre for the Aos). This stone used to disappear and reappear occasionally. One of the American missionaries struck at the stone to splinter it and within a week's time his only daughter died. There are many testimonies and evidences regarding the reality of these mysterious powers. If the people give due respect to them, they are believed to be harmless. They give blessings to those who are honest and humble. Even today many are facing such experiences hearing audible voices, seeing

1Ibid. p.219.
signs and wonders etc.

Not only are the aspects of nature divine but also house, the village and fields are regarded as divine. Regular sacrifices are offered to these evoking blessings. In case of sickness or any misfortunes Aoas blame the invisible forces around them, which are believed to inhabit in different places and objects. These are neither worshipped nor sacrifices are offered to them unless directed by diviners or soothsayers to appease these unseen deities called 'Taungram' (god). It is believed that these forces are powerless in front of those who have presence of mind with a strong confidence in one's spiritual capabilities.

Thus Aoas believe in a plurality of Gods such as 'Longkitaungba', 'Lija', 'Mayutsung' and other 'Numerous Deities'. One parallel world view to that of the Ao Nagas may be that of the Vedas. The Vedic deities appear to have a close resemblance to the Ao Naga's conception/deities, (the Vedic gods are
generally said to be three thousand three hundred and thirty nine in number\(^1\). We find 'upper' gods in the heavenlies, the 'middle' gods in the atmosphere and the 'lower' gods on the earth.

"Ye gods who are eleven in heaven, who are eleven on earth and who are eleven dwelling with glory in the mid-air, may be pleased with this our sacrifice"\(^2\).

The Vedic deities are not independent ones as the gods of the Aos but are the manifestation of the One Ultimate Reality in different expressions. As Rig Veda says:

"The One Being sages call by many names as they speak of Indira, Yama Natarisvan"\(^3\).

To those committed to the dualism of certain organised religions, the Vedic gods may appear nothing more than natural objects personified and worshipped. As in the Ao Naga religion, the natural and the supernatural are found to be mysteriously blended

\(^1\)Ibid. 111.9.9.
\(^2\)Rig Veda 1.139.11
\(^3\)Ibid. 1.164.46
together in the Vedic conception of god. Recognition of some objects of nature, by personifying and worshiping them as gods show their relationship to something supernatural.

The question of how man got the idea of God is not an issue to the Aos. Because they believe that man was, in the beginning with God, and so the stories of gods and man's relationship with them are believed to be true experiences of their ancestors. Man was with God and in course of time he departed from Him, though he has constant relationship with Him. Man is believed to be endowed more or less with powers which can be called supernatural.

In line with my view that the Ao Naga Religion is a world view which assigns divinity to every aspect of world, man, animal and nature, is my thesis that accordingly for the Aos there is no inherent qualitative difference between human and divine. It is like the spiritual essence of vedic 'atman' in man,
this 'atman' being used to imply the Supreme Spirit also. The Ao Naga view of relationship between God and man can be best understood with the help of the legends and tales prevailing among the people. There are legends regarding men marrying the daughters of God and 'Kodaklar' (heavenly girls). As the story goes there were two orphan boys. They had a flower garden. Every full moon night the 'Kodaklar' used to come down and collect the flowers. One night the two brothers were hiding to catch the culprits. The elder brother caught one and married her. She was very beautiful but as the years went by she became weak and pale. Once she asked her parents to send down a ladder from heaven and her husband went up with a message from her to the parents above. They gave him something wrapped in thirty leaves bound with thirty ropes and he was warned not to open the parcel on his way home. His curiosity got the better of him and he started removing the leaves one by one. Everytime he opened a leaf, a dove, sent
from heaven, would warn him. When he reached home only one leaf remained. At the request of his wife he went out of the home, but again being curious he peeped through the holes of the wall to know the secret of the contents of the heavenly parcel. To his great surprise, she opened the pack and took out a human palm, eating which she became as beautiful as when she had descended from heaven. Unable to bear the sight, he told his grand-father. His grand-father took her to deep forest and left her at the top of a big tree. After a few days when her husband went to see her with some food, she was turned into a strange creature called ‘Ongliang’. The face of this creature is half human and half animal. She neither recognised nor responded him.

Myths and legends of the Aos are explanatory. Every animal and as aspect of nature has a legend or a

* Aos believe that dove is a heavenly bird.

** The term ‘Ongliang’ is a mispronunciation of ‘Kongliang’ (Where stay). That the creature was crying as to where it could stay.
myth behind its peculiar characteristics. In this story we see the closeness between the heavenly being and human beings, and we also witness the curiosity of man to know the divine secrets. Intermarriages between the 'Kodaklar' and man illustrate the relationship/divine and man. However the heavenly being's inhuman eating of human palm is rejected by the human beings, and as the legend goes the human has the power to punish the heavenly being, in this case the wife was changed from a beautiful maiden to an abnormal creature. Apart from the inter­
marriages between the divine and the human, Aos believe that certain divine beings became human and vice versa. There is a clan among the Aos called 'Ozukumer' (Bird-formed-ones) which means the descendants of the divine bird. But in no way they consider the bird as a totem. There is another clan called 'Aniakar' (Sun's son). The tale goes that while at 'Chunglivimti' (the first village of the Aos) a virgin girl was impregnated by the sun and a son was born from whom that clan procreated. After many centuries, a young man of this clan married a daughter of 'Lijaha' (Creator God). There are significant places supporting these stories with signs and marks in the natural objects like footsteps on huge rocks, growing bamboo with upside down nodes and branches, spring of water from a dry rock, etc.
However Aos do not worship these incarnate beings having a divine origin, nor those persons who are possessed with greater supernatural powers. The linking of the divine and the human is evidenced in nature. It is a belief of even the modern Aos. In this context I would like to refer to the Vedic concept of divinity in man. In Vedic religion too we find man to be capable of attaining Brahman or Indra and claiming brotherhood with Devas. The Devas are of one spirit with men.* And with Brahmacharya, a man may become a member of the Devas. In Atharva Veda regarding Brahmacharin, it is said that he by "becoming a child in the womb of immortality became Indra and destroyed the power of darkness"**

The instances of closeness between the divinity and humanity through natural objects however should not be taken as examples of Aos' ignorance of natural and other forces. There is a tendency to underestimate the ancient's knowledge of his own nature and environment. Whatever may be the justification for this my point is that his belief in the closeness between them is not proof of his ignorance but rather the evidence of his deeper understanding of himself. Though man and God are not

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*Rig Veda VII.27.14

**Atharva Veda XI.5.7.
qualitatively different in the sense that man is capable of divinity yet the traditional religion emphasised the need for man to discipline himself and prepare himself for uncovering of the divinity inherent in him. In this it may not be justifiable to say that man makes God in his own image because he tries to fashion himself in the image of his God, and the ideals conceived. If God is made in the image of man, then man is made in the image of God. And therefore the ideals of humanity and divinity are met. Gods are in part the counterpart of human needs and those needs are various and many, and so the divine splits into a plurality.

Appearance of gods are frequent and thus the Aes consider the world to be full of gods. This is, to my view, the outcome of the idea that there is a fundamental all-pervading power that inhabits in all material as well as non-material objects.