CHAPTER - 111.
BELIEFS AND IDEAS ARE EXPRESSED IN THE FORM OF SYMBOLS AND RITUALS IN A SERIES OF CEREMONIES.

CEREMONIES ARE DISCIPLINARY, INTEGRATING AND VITALIZING FORCES. THE IMPORTANCE OF CEREMONIES IN ALL ASPECTS OF HUMAN ACTIVITIES CANNOT BE DOUBTED. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND IDEALS ARE ABSTRACT AND FORMLESS, AND THEY ARE TRANSLATED INTO CONCRETE AND MEANINGFUL FORM THROUGH RITES AND CEREMONIES. AN ANALYSIS OF MEANINGS EMBODIED IN THE AO NAGA RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES MAY GIVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NAGA RELIGION.

IN ALL CEREMONIES THERE ARE SACRIFICES, OBSERVATION OF CERTAIN DAYS AS RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS CALLED 'AMUNGA'. IN THESE PRACTICES THE DIVINERS PLAY A GREAT ROLE. IN THIS CHAPTER I WOULD LIKE TO CONSIDER THE MODE OF OBSERVING 'AMUNGA'; THE MEANING AND THE WAY OF OFFERING SACRIFICES; AND THE ROLE OF DIVINATIONS.

'AMUNGA' ARE THE DAYS ON WHICH RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES ARE PERFORMED. IT IS A REST DAY WITH CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS.

"AN AMUNGA DAY IS THE ONE ON WHICH MEMBERS OF THE VILLAGE MUST REFRAIN FROM WORK OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE. SUCH DAYS VARY IN STRICTNESS ACCORDING TO THE OCCASION (USUALLY A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY) WHICH
On amung days no one is allowed to go outside the village and no stranger is allowed to enter. In case the amung is for a household, the members are not to entertain anyone in the house. Even the next door neighbours should not enter the house. The members of the household or the village, as case may be, keep their thoughts and action as pious as possible. This isolation from communication from others and leading of a restricted routine is called 'anempong' (which may be understood as a taboo). The seriousness of restrictions and the number of days of anempong are more for the priests who will initiate the rites and ceremonies. If a household is 'anempong', a bunch of green leaves will be tied up at the entrance door post, so that others may see and take necessary precautions. The 'amung' are accompanied by 'anempong' (prohibition and restriction).

R.G.Lalthan in the 'Ethnology of India, 1859' and H.B. Rowny in the 'The wild tribes of India 1882' have identified both the 'amung' and anempong' in the term 'Genna' instead.

"The custom of Genna is this... the whole village is

1J.P. Mills. The Ao Nagas. p.82.
closed... work is suspended. Fires are put out.\textsuperscript{1}.

"The chief religious festival is called 'Genna', a sabath... when all the inhabitants of village celebrating it in complete isolation from others, sacrificing and drinking.\textsuperscript{2}

Those outsiders understood the 'amung' and 'anempong' as the chief ceremony rather these are the factors involved in all ceremonies. A. W. Davis in 'Census of India, 1891, Assam' innumerated as follows:

"The word Genna is used in two ways, (1) it may mean practically a holiday... (2) Genna means anything forbidden.\textsuperscript{3}

Here the holiday genna is 'amung' and the forbidden days are 'anempong'. As observed by those writers, Genna is never a festival nor a ceremony by itself. It is a feature of a festival or ceremony. There are 'amung' without 'anempong' also. In other words, there are ceremonies without restrictions and prohibitions.

The 'amungs' are of two kinds. One is to evoke blessings and another is to expel evils from the village or a household. Violation of the public 'amung' are seriously punished by the village authority. But the

\textsuperscript{1,2,3} Verrier Elwin, The Nineteenth Century Nagas. (Oxford University Press Bombay) 1969.
consequence of the violation of private among are to be borne by individuals themselves. 'Among's appear to be of great social cohesive values to the sociologists. However this view need not to be restricted to 'among's only. I am of the opinion that the various religious belief and rituals of the Ao Naga religion have great value, if of course one is looking for a sociological explanation of religion. Sociologists, for instance, find enough illustrations of the use of religious observances which would support the functionalist theory of religion. It seems to them that the religious observances are directed by the physical necessity of protecting men from bodily harm and getting food in abundance. The ceremonies and their observances to this end are not dependent upon certain individuals but the entire social unit, the whole village. In all 'among' days there are 'anempoung' for the priests and thus the purity and the sanctity were given over-ruling importance. This element is found lacking in the organised religions that are prevailing among the Nagas today. Weakening of taboos resulted in the weakness of their system of social control. The organised religion namely Christianity has divorced the religious life of the Nagas from their day to day living and their economic, political and other needs.
Aos are cultivators. An elaborate system of rituals is connected with the process of agricultural activity. There are as many as 12 regular public ceremonies within a year and a series of occasional ceremonies.

The village elders go and survey the jungle to clear for the new cultivation. The next day is 'amung' for the whole village while the priests go to the jungle and clear it a little and then sacrifice a cock. They pray to the 'Lijaba' that no calamities should befall nor accident should occur while clearing the jungle. After clearing the jungle within a period of a month or two, it is burnt on an appointed day. The next day again is 'amung' for the whole village. It is observed for the sanctification of the field lest any unclean animal or creature are burnt in the field by mistake. When the field is ready for sowing, the priests will go to the field while the villagers observe 'amung'. The priests sow seeds marking the beginning of sowing for the whole village. The priests are 'anampong' for 6 days. When tender plants start to grow in the fields there will be another 'amung' for the whole village. The priests will go outside the village and offer sacrifices praying to the gods that no insects should eat up the crops. After two or three months when the harvest time approaches the priests will go to the field and offer another sacrifice
of a cock while the villagers observe 'amung'.

Apart from the public religious ceremonies and offerings of sacrifices by the priests, every household performs a series of religious ceremonies in their respective fields. Each household has an alter in every field where they perform religious rites and rituals connected with cultivation. The father of the house is the priest for the family. From clearing the jungle for cultivation till the harvest the rites and ceremonies with sacrifices are carried on with all sincerity and purity. A young man learns all the techniques and way of performing different religious ceremonies before he gets married. In critical situations the priests and the elders may consult the diviners. As mentioned, apart from the ceremonies and sacrifices connected with cultivation there are regular religious ceremonies involving worship of 'Lijaba', gods of mountain, rivers and lakes, rocks etc. Occasional ceremonies are performed whenever any misfortune befalls on anyone individual or a family. Then the whole village observes 'amung' sharing the sorrows of the aggrieved individual or family and praying to God that such calamities may not be repeated in the village.

There are private ceremonies other than the ones connected with the field cultivation. There are the
worship of household deities, the god of heaven that controls and predestinate everyone's life, etc. My main point in referring to the ceremonies in connection with the agricultural activities and day to day life is to show that every life of the Ao Nagas is not cut off from his religious life. The two are inextricably linked up.

After the advent of Christianity, christians were severely fined for violating 'amung' s. They appealed to the British administrators but they were not exempted from some important 'amung' on the ground that the public 'amung' s were for the benefit of all. In many villages Christians were compelled to observe certain non-christian 'amung' s. In some of the Ao Villages they compelled to observe 'amung' s till 1960's. The spirit of Ao tradition has of course resulted in the strict observance of sundays as religious holidays by Ao Christians. On sundays they are not allowed to do manual work except for washing and cooking. They abstain from all other domestic works. They do not buy or sell anything on sundays. In case of dire necessity one may take something from others on credit and pay the price the next day. Such strictness of observing sundays was grounded on the traditional observance of 'amung' s.

"In fine, genna or taboo, exerts tremendous influence over the Aos, not only in connection with some particular phase of their lives but in every
assignable way\(^1\).

It is the 'amung' that regulates all activities and secures obedience to its manifold prohibitions by threats of punishment to be inflicted by the community or by invisible supernatural forces in the traditional Ao Naga community. During the 'anempong' days the person under anempong are under certain restrictions. This ritual of separation and demarcation are enforced with beliefs in danger of violating the restrictions. Today one misses greatly the seriousness of the people in the observance of religious ceremonies and the sanctity of the rites and rituals, the devotion of the priests and religious workers and the obedience of the people. The present religious life of the Ao Nagas is sadly lacking in the above mentioned qualities because of their new adopted culture, namely christianity.

An important part of the Ao Naga ceremonies are the various sacrifices offered to the divine. The Aos offer sacrifices to evoke blessings and protection, to avert evils and for purification of certain sins. In offering sacrifices, Aos do not lose anything for the sacrifice materials are never destroyed. They believe that the gods

take the essence of the sacrifice, so the material things that are sacrificed are consumed by the community itself as is the case in other religious communities. The economic value of the sacrificial things is never lost. Accordingly they consume the contents of the eggs but preserve the shells for their gods. In case of fowls the feathers and the bones will be offered at the 'anhu' (altar) which is made with several sticks criss-crossed. Similarly bones of the pigs and animals were also preserved while the meat is consumed. Whenever the need of sacrifice arises as directed or advised by the diviners, to the Nagas go even/distant places involving several days' journey in search of the animal to be sacrificed. They are ready to pay any price. In many cases the diviners will point out a particular animal to be sacrificed, and if the owner knows it, he will charge an unusual high price which will be bought without any bargaining. As mentioned, people do not suffer any economic loss in sacrificial ceremonies and rituals. Rather it may be noted that economic loss is much more in religious observances since the advent of Christianity in Ao land. I do not agree with R.J. Phillip who wrote in his book "The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland" regarding the Nagas as:

"People had to pay heavily for the religious observances. They were greatly burdened with such expenses. Thus saving a lot of money for their
own use. There was no compulsion to contribute to
the church.

The writer observed that the Nagas wasted more money in
their traditional religious observances. He shows that
due to the advent of christianity Nagas are saved from
such extravagant expenses. There is no justification of
his observation. The Ao Naga christians spend lavishly
for their religious observances. Whereas in the tradi-
tional religion they do not pay anything. Every
household is a religious institution where the father is
the priest. Private or household ceremonies and sacrifices
of the traditional Ao Nagas are more in number than the
public ceremonies. In public ceremonies they do not pay
much because as mentioned, they have common community
fund and property. The leftovers in the public ceremonies
are given to the priests. Priests are not paid but are
given honourarium on voluntary basis. Contrary to this
traditional system Aos spend a large sum of money for
religious observance and institutions today. In the new
adopted religion they pay compulsorily for the management
of the religious institutions and workers on the other

* According to the Ao Church Association report of 1979-80,
Aos spent Rs.40600/- monthly for the payment of Church
workers' salary in Ao land. In addition to this many reli-
gious workers are supported outside Nagaland. Every
village constructs a grand church building. A village church
building is under construction with an approximate estimated
expenditure of Rs.10 lakhs. There are regular religious
gatherings where huge amount of money is consumed. In 1972
half pay of every Ao Govt. servant was compulsorily deducted
from one month's salary for celebration of a religious
gathering.

1 p.184.
land. There is no full time paid religious workers among the traditional Ao Nagas. Everyone works hard for one's living. Neither there is any fixed place of worship for them. Every place is sacred for them and they are expected to be religious everywhere. No church building nor conventions and gatherings from different villages for religious purposes are required. Hence there is no justification for the statement that the Ao Naga religion was more expensive than the religion they are holding today.

Poor people who could not afford to provide the sacrificial animal were helped by relatives and loved ones, as the ideology of charity is enjoined in the spirit of ritual and sacrifice among the Aos. However, it is not to be understood as if the Ao Nagas do not sacrifice anything to their God. Substitution or propitiation has its place in the Ao Naga traditional religion. For instance, there is a kind of sacrifice offers in a special case (for the healing of a sick person) where the sacrificial animal is sent away to the forest. That is, sometimes the diviners may advise to let go of a cock, the animal to be sacrificed to the jungle. It is believed that the cock carries all their sickness and the god who inflicts the sickness takes the cock as sacrifice in place of the sick person's soul. Such cases are very rare.
Apart from the village elders who perform the function of the priests in all public ceremonies and functions, there are persons who are supposed to be endowed with the power of divination. The diviners are not regarded as religious officials, however, they are regarded as closer to gods having the spiritual power of knowing gods' plan and secret ways of human affairs. The diviners are not appointed nor given any official position in the community. They themselves claim to be possessed with the divinatory powers. And if their claim is justified they are given due recognition.

The service of the diviners are sought in two situations: (a) When a calamity happens in a household or in a village or to an individual, people seek to find out the cause of such calamities. The diviners ascertain the particular god responsible for such causes and reason thereof. They instruct the kind of sacrifice to be made to pacify that particular god. (b) Whenever important decision has to be taken by the people they seek the will and the help of the gods through the diviners. For instance, to wage a war against enemies the elders of the village consult the diviners as to whether or not they would win the battle. The diviner either will advise them to make precautions or desist from the battle, depending on the signs.
There are yearly sacrifices offered to famous gods at certain recognised mountains or boulders. The people seek the will of that god to find out who should be the priest to initiate the rites of particular sacrifice. Moreover, when a person is sick the diviner not only ascertains the god to be appeased but also points out the person, usually a relative who is to initiate the sacrifice.

Many of the diviners can cure physical illness. Divinatory practices play a great role in diagnosing illness. Some of the diviners use balm and certain techniques for the treatment of the sick.*

Divinations are of two kinds. Sometimes the diviner himself becomes the medium of communication to carry the message or the will of the supernatural. This takes place in a trance or in dreams. Diviners of this type are rare. Mostly the diviners interpret certain phenomena by the careful reading of omens. The reading of omens is unknown to the common people because the diviners have their own technique of interpretation. The most common way of reading omen is by tearing a kind of leaf into pieces. As J.P. Hills wrote:

*Many of the diviners who treat illness are those who possessed a tiger. But it is not that all those who possess tiger are diviners or medicine men.
"In one method the leaf is torn down the middle and the number and position of the torn fibres along the centre rib are examined... sometimes the two halves are dropped to the ground and the relative position in which they fall is observed".

In difficult cases people in groups go to different villages to consult different diviners. They bring from the different diviners the same instruction and directions to be followed. Though the diviners might not have seen the village or the place, they direct the people concerned to the exact place where the sacrifice is to be offered with accurate description of the place. They also locate the whereabouts of the sacrificial animal or the fowl in minute details. Such foreknowledge and accuracy of the diviners makes the common people to believe in them and to trust them.

The diviners do not usually ask for fee nor charge for their service. Those who seek their help offer them whatever they want to give. A diviner who demands payment is not regarded as a true soothsayer. This kind are not trusted. At present there are certain persons among the Aos who are possessed with the power of divination. Many seek their help to discover the meaning of certain inexplicable happenings in their life. They play the same role as they did in olden days among those who are still practising the Ao Naga religion. Many persons, even those who are not holding the Ao Naga religion are found to consult the diviners in certain matters.

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1Ibid. p.294