CHAPTER VI

RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION IN CHANGKI

W. C. Smith in *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam* wrote that ‘the Ao Nagas, in common with the hill peoples of this section and in many other parts of India, have a simple religion.’ The people believed that the universe was filled with a number of spirits with whom they must deal. He went on to say that ‘the propitiation of the evil and capricious spirits is practically the sum and substance of their religion’. Their main concern was with the appeasement of these capricious spirits so that they would be favoured with an abundance of good rice. J. P. Mills in *The Ao Nagas* on the other hand stated that ‘the religion of the Ao is not a moral code’. However Panger Imchen in *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture*, refuted this by saying that ‘the Aos had a well-established and systematized form of religious belief and practice’. The concept of god was very much in the consciousness of the Aos whom they called *Tsüngrem*. Temsula Ao in *The Ao-Naga oral tradition* wrote that ‘for the Aos, belief in the existence of a god or gods forms the core of their religion and is a guiding principle of their conduct in life’.

Panger Imchen wrote that the Aos believed in various *Tsüngrem* or gods such as *Lichaba*, creator of earth, *Longtitsünga*, lord of heaven, *Tiar/Tiaba*, god of providence and *Meyutsünga*, lord over the dead and several other minor deities. The Aos believed that *Meyutsünga* was the God of truth and justice and the final judge of the dead. *Meyutsungba* demanded a just life, pure and high moral and ethical standards; honesty and humility and as *Meyutsünga* was unforgiving, therefore the fear of him was the guiding principle for the Aos to live an honest life on earth. ‘His gate is the passage of the dead from the world of the living.’ *Meyutsünga* was believed
to be the silent spectator of man's activities on earth and was judged accordingly and often an Ao would say “let us see at the gate of Meyutsünba when false accusations were leveled at others. ‘no ceremonies and offerings are given to Meyutsünba for there is no scope of bargaining with him for mercy by offering sacrifices because he is god of righteousness.' The Aos believed in the concept of life after death, for they believed in a place called ‘Asū Yim/Diphu Yim’ or the village of the dead. They believed that on the way to the village of the dead they had to cross a stream called Longritiū – the lonely river. ‘On reaching Longritiū the dead must wash their hands to drink. As they put their hands together to hold the water in the palm, they find their hands have holes. They then realize they are dead and thus cross the river never to return.’ After crossing Longritiū the dead find themselves at Meyutsünba’s gate where the dead carry the load of deeds while on earth along with a spear to test themselves at the gate. The Aos believed that there was ‘a tree of righteousness called Tsünchidong/Asangdong and it was here that the dead would throw their spears at the tree and only the honest and righteous people could hit the tree in the middle and were admitted to the village of the dead through Meyutsünba’s house. Women, it was believed, threw their weaver’s baton. Those who did not live an upright and good life missed the tree and went to the village of the dead via the back of Meyutsünba’s house. It was believed that those who missed the tree of righteousness did ‘not reach the ancestral land of the dead but instead roamed for eternity in a place called Mata Yim, suffering sun burn and thirst in the midst of knife-edged grass called Nasū ni.” Panger Imchen put forward the theory that when the Christian missionaries came preaching about heaven and hell, the Aos could relate to it for it was a ‘confirmation of their ancient concept and belief and the fulfillment of their age long traditional belief and value system’.

The Aos also had a clear concept of one god above all deities, spirits and supernatural powers. The Aos believed that there was one supreme being called Jungphodemdem and as the Gospel of Christ taught about one
god in heaven, it was also in keeping with the Ao traditional belief. Panger Imchen postulated that the ideas and belief system of the ancient Ao religion made a preparation for the acceptance of Christianity among the people. The Aos also observed certain days as 'gennd', (an Angami term for taboo), and called it ‘amung’ when nobody could go to the fields and observed such days as scared. In the same token the Christians observe the Sabbath day on Sunday as holy and sacred. Panger Imchen made such comparisons between the ancient Ao religion and Christianity and said that factors such as the concept of god, the belief in the after life and reward according to one's conduct while on earth and observation of certain days as sacred contributed to the Aos finding an affinity with the new religion introduced. The Aos had their own world view, philosophy of life and an accepted assumption about the nature and existence of a god or gods, and of an after-life. Thus when the Christian missionaries came, although there was some resistance in the beginning, the Aos took to the new religion readily enough.

Advent of Christianity

The advent of Christianity into the Ao area is given briefly in the following: Christianity was first introduced in Molungkimong village in the Changkikong range and Changki is one of the nine villages in this range. Rev. Dr. E.W. Clark was the first American missionary to set foot in the Ao Naga Hills. He was born on 25th February 1830 in New York, U.S.A. After his post graduation and seminary studies, he was appointed by the American Baptist Missionary Union to the Assam mission on 28th July 1868. In October 1868, along with his wife Mary Mead Clark, he set sail from Boston and finally reached Sibsagar, Assam on 30th March 1869, where he took charge as missionary and also started a printing press. Sibsagar a small township east of Jorhat, located on the Dikho river, became a focal point for missionary activity. It was here that the Clarks came into contact with the Nagas, who came down from the hills to trade in the plains.

Rev. Dr. Clark was keen to take the gospel to the hills and in this endeavor Godhula, an Assamese evangelist and schoolteacher volunteered to
go up to the hills and survey the prospects. Godhula was assisted by Supongmeren, from Dekhahaimong village (now Molungkimong village, in the Changkikong range under Mokokchung district) who acted as his interpreter as he could speak Assamese with a certain degree of fluency. After befriending some more Nagas from Dekhahaimong (Molungkimong) village, Godhula and his wife Lucy, made the first historic trip to the hills in 1872, where they stayed throughout the rainy season. It was a successful trip for by November 1872, Godhula brought down with him nine converts whom Rev. Dr. Clark then baptized on 11th November 1872. The nine converts prevailed upon Rev. Dr. Clark to go up to their village to which he readily agreed. So with sixty escorts and sentinels for the protection of Rev. Dr. Clark, they set forth and on 18th December 1872, Rev. Dr. Clark reached Dekhahaimong (Molungkimong), the first Ao village which embraced Christianity. Thus the advent of Christianity in Nagaland began. From Dekhahaimong (Molungkimong) the Clarks along with the converts shifted to Molung in 1876 due to hostilities from the non-converts. Molung thus became the first fully christian village and it was here that the first American Baptist Mission centre was established. The first Ao primer was printed at Molung in 1877 and the first christian marriage took place in 1878. It was from this centre that the christian mission began to expand, till due to its more ideal and central location, a new mission centre was set up in Impur, near Mokokchung, with the assistance of Rev. and Mrs. Haggard and Rev. and Mrs. Perrine on 1st October 1894.

Establishment of the Baptist Church in Changki

The Changki people are christians of the Baptist denomination. The establishment of the Baptist church in Changki celebrated its 100th year in 2001. Although the Changki people practiced the indigenous religious and belief system before conversion to christianity, once they converted to christianity they gave up all the ancient religious beliefs, including the traditional Ao festivals such as Mostuí (before harvest) and Tsüngremong (after harvest), which are still being celebrated in other Ao villages. As such
no one can recount the rituals and ceremonies of the ancient religion that were practiced in Changki. It is believed that before the advent of Christianity *Aodang* and *Putsülöng* in the lower khel, and *Tekongkulem* and *Emsen kiong* in the upper khel were considered the most sacred religious sites in Changki.

Christiansity was first introduced in the Naga Hills when Dr. E.W. Clark set up the Baptist mission in Dekhahaimong (Molungyimsen) in 1872, which was later shifted to Molung in 1876. Both these villages are in Changkikong range in close proximity to Changki. The first Christian evangelist to come to Changki was Godhula who was sent to the village with the purpose of spreading the Gospel as well as setting up a school in 1883. But the Changki villagers refused to give permission and he had to go back.  

When the Impur Mission opened in 1894, one Changki man called Tzüdiyong, went there to work in the Mission as a manual labourer and he became the first Changki to become a christian. However he was not baptized till much later, nor could he write or read. But he went to Changki village in 1896 and tried to spread the gospel but the villagers did not allow him. Even his own family and clansmen threatened to expel him from the village.  

Meanwhile in the year 1897, during the Ao *Moatsu* festival (before harvest) in Changki, a quarrel between the lower and upper khel people erupted which escalated into a civil war with the villagers beheading fellow villagers. The SDO of Mokokchung sub-division at that time was A.E.H. Shuttleworth who sent troops to quell the trouble and rounded up the culprits, who were marched off to Kohima for rigorous imprisonment and hard labour.  

The villagers had to undergo extreme deprivation and suffering as the British administration took punitive actions against the village for headhunting had been abolished. At the same time there was an outbreak of
an epidemic, which forced many people to go away from the village. One such villager was Odangba who left Changki in 1897 and went to Impur to work as a cook with the missionaries. In 1898, Odangba brought his brother, Impokumba to Impur, where both of them converted to Christianity and learned to read and write. Odangba was baptized on 4th November 1899 at Impur by Rev. Perrine. His brother Impokumba who had also attended primary school was baptized in 1900 by Rev. Rivenburg. Thus Odangba became the first baptized christian among the Changki people.16

Impokumba was first sent to Changki as a schoolteacher to teach the gospel and also to teach the people to read and write. The first four students who attended his classes were Yalemchang, Yimkongchurong, Karidangchetba and Nikenmeri. Impokumba also held Sunday services and in this way three persons namely Nokchameri, Nokmechaba and Imtipokyim converted to christianity and with these converts, the Changki Baptist church was established on 20th October 1901. However the converts were baptized only in 1903, for they had to go to Impur for the baptism. Impokumba was also appointed as a government L.P. teacher in 1903 when the mission school he had established was upgraded to that of a government primary school.17

Odangba came to Changki from Impur as the first Pastor in 1905 and he continued till 1915. His wife Rongsentula of Molungyimsen village started the women department in the church in 1905. Thus christianity took root in Changki village.18

An important feature of the Church was the youth wing and during the time of Pastor Nikenmeri (1920 – 1924) a ‘Central Hostel’ was instituted, mainly for the boys, with the understanding that the youth studying in the mission school would sleep there.18 The idea was to foster camaraderie, cooperation, understanding and harmony between the youth of the upper and lower khel, as well as to teach the gospel. This came to be known as the
'Room' equivalent to the *ariju* (male dormitory) system only the 'Room' was based on christian doctrines.

But this hostel, where both the upper and lower khel youth were to live in, proved to be inconvenient so each khel started its own hostel. Soon there was a 'Room' for the boys as well as the girls in both the khels and all the youth were directed to sleep there regardless of whether they attended school or not. The youth would go about their work as usual in the daytime but in the evening the youngest boys or girls of the lot would be sent to call all the others to come to the 'Room'. If some could not go to the 'Room' due to unavoidable circumstances, the message would be sent through the youngsters sent to call them.

The youth were taught to write, read, sing, pray and speak/preach in public. Strict discipline was enforced and the youth not following the rules and regulations of the 'Room' were giving harsh punishment. The punishment was to fetch a piece of wood measuring three feet in width and three feet in height. This meant that those punished would have to go to the jungles to find a tree measuring three feet wide and cut it to the required size.

The youth of the 'Room' were also responsible for pounding, winnowing and cleaning the rice belonging to the church when major events took place in the church and community feasts were given. The 'Room' boys and girls fetched water and firewood for their respective 'Rooms' which had to be kept immaculately clean. The youth were also responsible for keeping church premises clean and were the volunteers for all church activities. When a member of the 'Room' got married, the room mates would get together and carry out the necessary arrangements for the wedding.

The youth were also strictly prohibited to mingle with the opposite sex. This was most probably in keeping with the foreign missionaries' view of ensuring moral discipline and the 'Room' became taboo for the opposite sex to enter. Education as well as deportment was taught to all the youth in the
village. The concept of the *ariju* (male dormitory) and the *zuki* (female dormitory) was adapted into the christian mould and it was successful for the 'Room' imparted education and strengthened the foundation of christianity in the village.

Unfortunately in the early days church records were not maintained so the activities and functions are at best sketchy and based on stories told by old people of the village who went to such 'Rooms'. The exact date is not known but the 'Room' became defunct in the late 1960's and the reason given is that many of the villagers, especially the youth began to go out of the village for further studies and to look for jobs. The strict discipline of the 'Room' was also cited as one of the reasons.

**Split in the Church**

In the earlier chapter on kinship we have touched upon the claims *made by a clan as the original founding clan in the lower khel*. The discord and disharmony created by this claim had direct fallout within the church. It is told that an Emrem Changki clan member had been allegedly caught stealing and this was reported to the village government and as per customary law he was fined as well as excommunicated from the church. However the person who had reported the theft retracted his statement and instead said that he had given permission to the Emrem Changki man to take the produce from his land. Despite this, the excommunication of the Emrem Changki clan member came about because one of the Changkiri clan member was an influential man in the church and soon the whole matter became a personal matter as the two men belonged to the rival clans. Refusing to accept the punishment, in retaliation, the Emrem Changki clan member along with his supporters left the church and established a parallel church in the lower khel in 1947. The “Changki Yimlang Baptist Church” was thus established. Following this a school was also established at Aodang and along with it, their own student union was formed.
The two churches are independent entities each with its own treasury and congregation and the functioning of the two churches is along the same lines. A brief account of the organisation of the Baptist Church Changki (mother church) and Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) is given in the following passages:

The Baptist Church Changki (mother church) has 1,249 baptized members. Baptism takes place when a boy or girl reaches the age of 14-15 and it is after baptism that a person is considered as a full-fledged member of the Church for it is only after baptism that the name is entered in the Church register. At present the Pastor is Imnachuchai and the secretary is Allen Amri. The congregation comprises of the upper and majority of the lower khel people.

The Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) was established in 1947. The first Pastor was Temsumeren Aonok. There are a total number of 387 baptized members Changki Yimlang Baptist Arogo. At present the Pastor of the Church is Tekachuchang and the Secretary is Toshimenba. The congregation comprises of a section of only the lower khel.

The Baptist Church Changki (mother church) and Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) Organisation

In both the churches all powers and functions are vested on the Board of Deacons, for the administration of the church and the Pastor is the overall in-charge of it. He presides over all the meetings connected with the Church. The other committees all have heads of department and function separately but with the approval of the Deacon board. There is a treasurer each for the main church as well as the women's department. The secretary maintains all the official files of the church. The associate pastor, who helps the pastor in the administration of the church, takes over the charge when the pastor is out of station or is indisposed.
The pastor is required to have the minimum theological qualification of B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity). His main functions are to teach the gospel, through the Sunday devotional services, to give baptism classes and to baptize and to look after the spiritual well being of his congregation. He is also the administrative head of the church and all cash transactions and official documents require his signature. He is the chairman of the deacon board as well as the ex-officio member of all the committees under the main church. The annual report is presented by him and he is the official representative of the village for all programmes, activities and conventions connected with the church.

Deacon Board

The Deacon Board of both the churches headed by the pastor comprises of only male members who are respected elders and active members of the village and church and also retired people such as teachers, government servants and Gaon Buras. There are 11 board members in the Baptist Church Changki (mother church) and 10 board members in the Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group). The main function of the Deacon board is to make the annual programme for the church as well as the annual plan, budget and projects. The Deacon board also selects the auditors from the public to conduct the half yearly and annual audits of the church. The Deacon board is also responsible for selecting the Christian Youth Endeavor (CYE) office bearers and the heads of the various departments under the church. In all the various committees a representative from the Deacon board is mandatory. The members of the Deacon board are prohibited from active participation in the general political processes. The nomination of full time workers such as Engkum (cooks for church visitors from outside and for feasts organized by the church) and Ajakmapang (collectors of the 10% Tithe paddy and the one’s who dry the paddy and take to the rice mills for husking and so on) for the church is done by the Deacon board.
Christian Youth Endeavor (CYE.)

The Changki CYE began in 1911 under the name Christian Endeavor (C.E) but discontinued in 1916. It was started again in 1921 with affiliation to Ao Baptist Argo Mungdang (ABAM), the apex body of the Ao churches. Initially the youth services were held twice a month which was increased to a weekly basis in 1925. In 1932 the Senior Society of Changki Youth Endeavor was registered in the C.E Union of India, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The C.E. in 1934 had the senior and junior classes and in 1935 the Intermediate class was incorporated. The infant grade was also made a part of the C.E. in 1957. A compulsory enrolment of membership in the C.E. was enforced at a certain age group from 1959 in order to strengthen the Society. The office bearers and the executive committee were selected for a term of three years from 1961. The Sunday school came under the rules and regulations of the C.E. but in 1963, the Sunday school separated itself from the C.E. In 1969, the name C.E. was renamed Christian Youth Endeavor (CYE).

The various committees under the leadership of the youth director of the Baptist Church Changki (mother church) are as follows:

1. Executive committee
2. Programme committee
3. Look-out committee
4. Finance committee
5. Gospel committee
6. Good news committee
7. Music club
8. Sports committee
9. Beautification committee
10. Cross-road club
11. Cadet club
12. Crusader club
The main function of the CYE is to provide a forum for the youths to develop christian spirituality and their talents — be it singing, music, preaching or leadership qualities and so on. The CYE has a president, vice president and general secretary, CYE assistant general secretary and CYE treasurer. The CYE executive board members comprises of the following members:

1. Youth director — Board chairman
2. CYE officers - 4 members
3. Deacon board — 1 member
4. Main church — 1 member
5. CYE congregation — 1 member
6. Christian education director
7. CYE Treasurer — ex-officio member
8. CYE advisor

The Cadet club is comprised of students from Class IV – VII with a Squadron Leader heading it. The Cross Road club comprises of students from VII – IX with a leader called Banneret. The Crusader club comprises of class X students as well as college students with a chaplain as its leader. These various clubs have their own activities and are assigned tasks especially during special programmes organized by the CYE, the main church or the women’s department.

The CYE functions independently of the main church but is subject to its approval and ratification. The main source of income for its various programmes and activities is from the main church. Other funds are raised through music concerts, sale of handicrafts made by the members, labour — that is, sometimes the members hire themselves out for doing work on a daily wage basis, service offerings, donations, entertainments, and projects. The CYE conducts weekly services from 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm on Sundays. The CYE generally organizes and conducts its programmes and activities as per the directives of the ABAM.
In 1947 when there was split in the church, the Changki Yimlang Baptist church (breakaway group) started its own CYE wing and the first CYE President was Nokchameri. The CYE has a president, vice president and general secretary, CYE assistant general secretary and CYE treasurer. The CYE executive board members comprises of the following members:

1. Youth director – Board chairman
2. CYE officers – 2 members
3. Deacon board – 1 member
4. church members – 1 member
5. CYE members – 1 member
6. CYE treasurer – ex-officio member

As the CYE members less than 100 students in number in this church, the various clubs such as the Cadet club, the Cross Road club and Crusader club function not according to the class or age of the students but are clubbed together for various programmes. The main activity of the CYE is social work through which they raise funds as well as do charity works.

The Women’s Department

The women’s department of the Baptist church Changki (mother church) began in 1905 under the leadership of Mrs. Rongsentola, wife of Odangba, the first pastor. She was given a pay of 8 annas (50p) and had two treasurers and four other colleagues to assist her. The function of the women’s department was to educate the women and to teach the gospel to them. The following are the women who served as leaders of the women’s department.

1. Rongsentola – 1905 – 1915
3. Chenlinokchala – 1919 – 1920
7. Tiangsen  1942 – 1952  
8. Mariam  1953 – 1963  

The main function of the women department is to look after the spiritual needs as well as fellowship and welfare of the women folk. The department conducts training, seminars and so on with the approval of the main church. Bible studies are also conducted regularly. The women department carry out charity work for the poor and needy through home visitations and by giving aid either in cash, prayer or kind. The department conducts worship service every Thursday from 5:30 am – 6:30 am.

The women department is headed by a woman leader also called the associate pastor (woman) and is comprised of a secretary, two key holders and 23 women elders. The women department is an independent department and it generates its own income for the upkeep of the department and the salaries of the workers. However the approval of the main church is required for any programmes that the women department undertakes.

The sources of income for the department are as follows:
1. Women service offering
2. Dedication of new born children thanksgiving offering
3. Pottery offerings
4. General thanksgiving offerings
5. Donations
6. Wages – 2 days wages of every woman is collected twice yearly @ Rs. 65
7. Poultry thanksgiving
8. Handful of rice (for every meal) is collected by each household for weekly donation to the department
9. Mother’s day service offerings from the main church service are given to the department.
10. Some women give their tithe (10% of their monthly earnings) to the women department.

The associate pastor (women) or the women leader gets a monthly salary of Rs. 3535. The secretary gets a monthly salary of Rs. 1933. The women elders get a yearly lump sum of Rs. 600 while the key holders and treasurer get a yearly lump sum of Rs. 700.

The Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) women’s department began functioning in 1948 with Aluenla as the first women leader. The following are the women who served as women leaders:

1. Aluenla ——— 1948 - 1958
3. Tekayangla ———— 1962 – 1965
5. Temjensangla ———— 1971 – 1982
8. Imlila Amri ———— 1998 – till date

This department is independent of the main church and it raises funds and generates income for the upkeep and salaries of the workers through activities such as the following:

1. sale of bamboos
2. sale of firewood
3. collection of rice from each household
4. charity box in each household
5. new born child dedication thanksgiving offerings
6. chicken/vegetable thanksgiving
7. donations
8. household membership fees

The department conducts weekly devotional services every Thursday from 6 am – 7am. Every Tuesday a fellowship service of the women elders are held. The women department is headed by a women leader also called the
associate Pastor (Woman) and is comprised of a secretary, two key holders and 15 women elders. The associate pastor is paid a salary of Rs. 3983 per month, the secretary Rs. 1000 while the key holders and women elders are paid a lump sum of Rs. 500 annually.

The Child Department

The Baptist Church Changki (mother church) Child Evangelism department was started in 1967 under the tenure of Rev. Ajangto who was then the pastor of the church. Mrs. Intinekenla and Mrs. Imtkala were the one's who initiated and led this department. The child department was looked after by the women's department, however in 1975, the child department was handed over to the main church by the women's department and in 1986, a full time child director was appointed. In 1987, the child department became a separate unit under the guidance of the church.

The child department as of now is headed by Miss. Temjenlila (B.Th), child director, and the children who are taught the Bible, songs, musical instruments and so on are divided into three groups. The children from class A to class VIII are divided accordingly:

Class A - B - Inok House
Class I - 2 - Abel House
Class 3 - 8 - Cain House

The child department conducts weekly Sunday services from 11 am – 12 pm, while the Bible study is conducted every Wednesday. At present there are 200 children registered in the child department. Many extracurricular activities such as guitar lessons, visitations to other villages, children rallies, retreats, camps and so on are being carried out. They also do social work by giving special treats to the poor and needy such as cakes, clothes and so on during Christmas and Easter and so on. The only source of income for this department is from well-wishers in the form of offerings and donations but other requirements for various activities are given by the main church if it is
approved by the deacon board. The annual report is given to the main church along with the financial statement and budget for the coming year.

The child department board members are:

1. Child director — chairman
2. Church members — 2
3. Associate pastor, (women)
4. Women department members — 1
5. Music director
6. Deacon board — 1
7. Sunday school secretary
8. Pastor – ex-officio

The Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) child department and Sunday school is headed by the child director, with a Sunday school superintendent to assist. As the children are less in number the activities of both the departments are combined in this congregation. The Sunday school has classes from beginner to intermediate, which follows the syllabi set by the ABAM, Impur centre. Final examinations are conducted every year and the marks sent to ABAM, Impur centre and the students awarded merit certificates according to their marks.

The board members are as follows:
1. Child director — chairman
2. Sunday school teachers — 2
3. Deacon board representative — 1
4. Church members — 1
5. Youth director
6. Women leader
7. Sunday school superintendent

In addition to the Sunday school for children, an adult Sunday school is also conducted every Sunday, where Bible studies and commentaries on
spiritual matters are discussed. The adult Sunday school is from 1 pm – 2 pm and approximately 30 – 40 adults attend the classes.

The Sunday school

The Baptist Church Changki (mother church) also conducts Sunday school for children separately. The exact date and year of the establishment of the Sunday school is not known but it has been a part of the church’s programme for a long time. The department is under the Christian education director but presently, the child director heads it. The classes are being taught by school teachers on a voluntary basis. There are at present four classes:

1. Beginner —— classes A, B, I, (four sections)
2. Primary —— classes II, IV (five sections)
3. Junior —— classes V, VI, VII (three sections)
4. Intermediate — classes VIII, IX, X (three sections)

The curriculum for the Sunday school is set by ABAM (Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang) the apex body of all the churches in the Ao area and every year examinations are held and the marks sent to the ABAM Centre, Impur. The children are awarded merit certificates depending on their marks. The Sunday school is also looked after by the child director. Five teachers also help in teaching the Sunday school classes on a voluntary basis but the church gives them Rs.300/- as ‘bonus’ every month.

The board members of the Sunday school are:

1. Child director — chairman
2. Sunday school teachers — 1
3. Church members — 1
4. Pastor ex- officio
5. Sunday school secretary
6. Deacon board — 1
Mission Board

The Mission board of the Baptist church Changki (mother church) was established in 1978 to oversee the missionary activities of the church such as sponsoring of pastors, missionaries, evangelists and youth workers to various fields and also to sponsor teachers and headmasters. The pastor is the ex-officio chairman of the board. A general secretary, assistant secretary and a treasurer is chosen from among the board members. There are at present 18 members. The missionary work of the Baptist church Changki is carried out from income of different sources such as:

1. One rented house at Dimapur
2. Interests earned from bank deposits
3. Collection from devotional services
4. Collection from the observance of the annual Missionary Day
5. Donations from individuals, clans, societies and so on

The main function of the Mission board is to chalk out the annual plans and activities for the church as well as to draft rules and regulations for those in the mission field, with due approval from the Deacon board.

The Mission board members are:

1. Associate pastor ----- chairman
2. Deacon board representative ---- 1
3. General congregation members ---- 8
4. Women department representatives ---- 4
5. Missionary ---- 1
6. Pastor ---- ex-officio
7. Christian education director/child director
8. Associate pastor (women)

The Changki Yimlang Baptist Church (breakaway group) Mission board was established in 1988 and its main function is to oversee all the mission works that the church undertakes such as sending missionaries to the field. The board is responsible for collecting donations for such works.
The board members are the following:

1. Pastor ..... chairman
2. Deacon board representative ..... 1
3. church members ..... 6
4. Women leader
5. Youth director
6. Child director

Evangelist committee

Both the churches have this committee and the main function of this committee is to visit the elderly, weak and sick people who cannot attend church to give them prayer support on behalf of the church. They also distribute paddy to the poor and aged who have no one to look after them. The Deacon board assesses the paddy revenue of the church and accordingly allots 10 – 15 tins of paddy annually for the poor and aged. They also visit other villages on preaching tours, representing the church in the outreach missionary tasks. All expenditure of this committee is borne by the church.

Theological Scholarship Committee

The Baptist Church Changki (mother church) has also instituted a Theological scholarship committee. There are five members in this committee with the pastor as the ex-officio member. This committee is responsible for helping those students who want to pursue higher studies in Theology by helping them find placements in the Senate of Serampore, the premier institute for Theology in India. Once the church recommends a student for B.D. a recommendation fee of Rs. 1000/- is given by the church. Those wanting to pursue post graduate degree (M.Th), the church will sponsor the deserving candidate. For instance, this year, the pastor is being sponsored by the church for M.Th degree in Bangalore, by giving study leave with full pay.
Mission School

The Mission School is run by the Baptist Church Changki (mother church) and celebrated its 100th year in 2001. The Mission School board comprises of the following:

1. Deacon board representatives ------ 2
2. church members ------ 8
3. Headmaster ex-officio secretary
4. Pastor ex-officio
5. School teacher representative ---- 1

The board recommends and selects the headmaster/headmistress and teachers and fixes the school fees and so on. The board also makes the plans and budget for the school year. All decisions are taken after 2/3 (two/third) majority votes of the board. The church controls all the financial and administrative function of the school.

Role of the Church in Changki

The rules and regulations of both the churches in Changki are very explicit and it is very strictly implemented and followed. It is only after Baptism that an individual becomes a full fledged church member with the name entered in the church registry. However as the organization, function and activities of the church shows, it is from a very young age that training and inculcation of the christian tenets are imparted. From Bible studies beginning in the Sunday school to the CYE activities, the children and youth are trained and kept busy. It is mandatory that the children be enrolled in the Sunday school and CYE.

Attendance of the adults in the weekly Sunday church service is also considered important but more than that the giving of Tithe, that is, the 10% of one’s earnings, is deemed to be most important. The philosophy of the villagers being “give unto god what is god’s” is followed diligently. Anyone growing vegetables, poultry, pigs and who sell these give 10% of their profit, or if they have a surplus but do not sell, they will give as Thanksgiving a
sum that they surmise to be equivalent to 10% of their produce. It may be noted that when the villagers give Thanksgiving contributions/donations of poultry, pigs or other produce, it is always in cash. It is only paddy that is accepted by the church as Tithe. The church is dependent on the tithe and the donations or thanksgiving for its maintenance and upkeep. The salaries and miscellaneous expenditure is drawn from these sources. The membership fees paid to the apex church body the Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang is also from these sources. The church also organizes fund raising events and functions from time to time.

The church exercises control over its congregation by the rules and regulations laid down which also covers the personal life, lifestyle and behaviour of the individual. Anyone found guilty of promiscuity and causing public disturbance and bringing shame to the village are excommunicated from the church. Anyone caught stealing and being fined for “Aomez” (customary fine for stealing) of Rs.500/- and above are also excommunicated from the church. If a married person commits adultery, he/she is also liable to be excommunicated from the church, apart from being fined three pigs by the Village Council. There is also a rule that if an individual wants to marry someone who is not a Baptist Christian and if that person does not convert, the church will not only permit the couple to be married in the church, the individual who marries outside of the denomination/religion is also excommunicated from the church. In case of a divorce the one who is found to be guilty and responsible for the break up of the marriage is excommunicated from the church.

If a young girl has a child out of wedlock she and her partner are excommunicated from the church too. If the couple decides to marry they will not be able to marry in church. The pastor will bless them at home and declare them married. When a person gets excommunicated from the church, the person’s name and the reason for the excommunication is announced in the Sunday weekly service to the congregation and the name is struck off the register. However, even if a person is excommunicated, he/she is not barred
from attending the Sunday weekly services or other activities in the different departments. After a lapse of time, the minimum being three months, a person may ask pardon from the Deacon board and will be readmitted to the church as a regular member and the name re-entered in the church register.

In this way the lives of the people are controlled and regulated by the church. Excommunication is regarded as the maximum punishment that can be meted out to a person for wrongdoing. A person’s social standing and role in society is tainted forever if he/she has been excommunicated from the church for any reason. The role of the church is more powerful in the village than in other urban towns as the community is smaller and more compact.

**Impact of Christianity**

The introduction of Christianity beginning in 1901 and in its wake, education, has played a major role in bringing about change among the Changki villagers. Along with the new religion, education was also accepted as beneficial for the people. Thus began an era where the old gave way to the new.

The establishment of schools opened new opportunities and changed the worldview of the people. Through education and opportunities presented in the form of employment outside the village many luminaries from Changki village emerged who were pioneers in various fields. Due to economic compulsions, the Changki people left the village and settled in other places and although links with the village were maintained in the beginning through relatives and due to ownership of home sites and rice fields, these linkages began to weaken with the passage of time. We find that some of the people who have settled outside have no association with the village at all.

J.P. Mills in *The Ao Nagas* writing about the Ao tribe in general stated that the non-Christian Ao thought and worked for the welfare of his village and hated to live away from it. But with the conversion to Christianity there
came about changes for "though the Christian still retains some of the love for his village and willingness to serve it, the feeling is undoubtedly less strong in him. Christians are often quite willing to live elsewhere than in their villages, and converts frequently refuse to take any part in its government. Attempts are often made to avoid little acts of social service on the most trivial excuses." He observed that the personal convenience of the Christian was put above the common sentiments of their neighbours. He went to say that "in matters where their religion is concerned christians will work well together, but in secular matters they are inclined to rate the welfare of the individual far above that of the body politic, and if the process continues their villages will become mere collections of houses instead of highly-organised social units in which every man shoulders the burden of service and responsibility."

Although Mills' observations on Christianity and conversion to the new religion and the changes brought about by it was on the whole Ao tribe in general, we find that such observations are also pertinent to Changki village. Christians brought in its wake a weakening of the strong bonds of community living and cooperation. Individualism and self interest began to assert itself and this can be seen in the fact that due to certain individuals' interests outside of the christian mould, a second church was established in 1947 thereby causing a rift among the congregation and villagers, particularly that of the lower khel as the breakaway church was established by some of the lower khel people.

With the advent of Christianity and education was also introduced changes in lifestyles and habits were also introduced. W.C. Smith in The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam observed that such changes were "especially noticeable in the village of Changki, which has the largest number of better Christians, has better houses, is cleaner than other villages, and the people themselves are much cleaner than in many of the other villages."
As explained in Chapter II the Ao tribe comprises of three linguistic groups, Chungli, Mongsen and Changki. With the advent of Christianity and education in its wake, the Chungli language was adopted as the common language for all Ao people for the simple reason that the first missionaries lived in a Chungli speaking village and in the ensuing years the Bible was translated into Chungli and the first Ao primer was written in Chungli. All school work and religious work began to be carried out in Chungli. Smith observed that “the reduction of the language to writing is tending to unite the whole tribe.”

Through conversion to Christianity and education, the Changki people took up the Chungli language as the medium for school work and religious work and in such ways the people could make much headway for now communication were easier with the common language.

Changes also began to be brought about in material equipment such as fire-arms and metal cooking utensils, clothing and food habits. However such changes also led to the erosion of the traditional arts such as pottery, weaving of different cloths and with the introduction of fire-arms, random hunting led to extensive depletion of the wild life leading to environmental degradation.

The ban on the Arju (morung) dormitories and the loss of its significance in the lives of the people led to the deterioration of a powerful disciplinary agency. The social control exercised through the Arju and the concept of community participation began to be dissipated. With the new religion, the people rejected the traditional festivals and ceremonies and other cultural traits such as the oral tradition which was only means of recording history, legends and folklore and so on of the people.

The Arju or male dormitory system was abolished along with all aspects of the indigenous religion, even to the extent of giving up the Moatsu and Tsungremong festivals, which are the two main festivals of the Ao. In
fact none of the Changki villagers can recall any stories about the ancient religion. The people rejected all traditional customs and beliefs and wholeheartedly embraced the new religion. Superstitious beliefs and taboos were also weakened if not rejected. In this way, we find that in Changki, the traditional aspects of the society such as indigenous festivals, dances and singing are absent.

At the empirical level a cross section of people have expressed the view that such total rejection of the traditions and customs has been a loss and the people feel a sense of something vital and vibrant missing. The other Ao villages also make jibes at the Changki people for not having any 'culture' which cannot be denied for much of the rich cultural legacy in the form of dance, songs, oral tradition, festivals, games and so on has been lost.

Although Christianity has been accepted and the population of the village comprises of only Baptist Christians, we also find that divisions have been formed, for in the village there are two parallel churches of the same denomination. The unity and solidarity of the village has been affected by this division for the loyalty of the people extends to their church only. For example, the members of the particular church will work for and consider as important only the church that they belong to. The year 2005 will commemorate the Centennial jubilee celebration of the women's department wing of the church but we find that in this too, the people belonging to the breakaway church have decided not to participate in the celebrations.

Some members of both the churches have made the effort to unite the two churches but so far this has not borne any results. The people are generally of the opinion that having two churches of the same denomination within a village diminishes the unity of the village but most people were careful about what they said and often told this researcher that some things are best left alone. As mentioned before, Changki has the dubious distinction of having two churches of the same denomination.
At the empirical level the older generations expressed disappointment that the younger people do not participate in the church activities as much as they did. The younger generation, on the other hand, were more cynical and said that the traditional mind set and the rigid ways of conducting the affairs of the church is something they cannot agree to but cannot voice out their opinions because it would mean censure of the worst kind.

Earlier in this chapter it was mentioned that the church had initiated 'Rooms' or separate dormitories for boys and girls where they learned the Scriptures, songs and christian tenets and also slept there. The rooms became defunct and its absence in the lives of the villagers is felt to be a general loss especially by the older generation. Those who had attended the 'Room' were of the opinion that it was through this 'Room' system that they learned the skills of praying, preaching and singing; discipline was strictly enforced and in this way social control was exercised.

The church in Changki may not be as strong as it was earlier on but it still plays an important role in the lives of the people. Its role as an agency of social control is evidently very important for any wrong doing committed against the rules and regulations of the church results in ex-communication which is regarded as the ultimate social disgrace that can befall on anyone.

The church is also male dominated where the Deacon board composed of only males' exercise control over the functioning of the church. The patrilineal and patriarchal pattern of the society is reflected in the functioning of the church. This is also seen most visibly when women who belong to the mother church marry a man from the breakaway church or vice versa. In such cases the women switch membership to the church where their husbands have membership. There are no instances where the husband and wife belong to different congregations. We find that 43 women from the Baptist church Changki have been transferred to the Changki Yimlang Baptist church and 44 women from the Changki Yimlang church have been transferred to the Baptist church Changki.
The women's department in both the churches is under the control of the Deacon board and although the department can raise funds meant exclusively for programmes meant for women, the department requires the permission of the respective Deacon board to carry out any activities and is under the overall control of the main church. We find that the role that the church plays is still an important one for apart from membership to a clan church membership is also a vital factor in the lives of the people.

Summary

Changki society comprises of Christians of the Baptist denomination. The village is cent percent Christian and the church plays an important role in the lives of the people. The advent of Christianity has had an immense impact on Changki society. With the acceptance of Christianity the people rejected all the old religious rituals and beliefs, but interestingly enough the people initially adapted the new Christian teachings to traditional values such as the 'Room’ system which was like the 'arju' (male dormitory) or 'zuki' (girls dormitory). The training of the young people was based on Christian teachings where strict discipline and adherence to the rules of the 'Room' was observed and deviation from such rules invited stringent punishments.

With regard to the organisation of the church Panger Imchen in Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture, stated that the ancient village 'republic’ system has been incorporated into the church administration. He cited the example of the Deacon board and compared it to the 'Putu Menden' the traditional Chungli system of village government. The Deacon board is compared to the traditional councillors represented by each clan in the village, although the membership in the Deacon board is not based on clan representation. The Mission Kibur who is the chairman of the church elders is compared to the Village Council chairman. The pastor does not possess any special powers and is merely the one who conducts church services and ceremonies such as during weddings and funerals. Any resolution, project, emergency, budget, general rules or disciplinary actions within the church
jurisdiction must first have the approval of the Deacon board and if there are matters that involve the village, it will be referred to the Village Council. Thus according to Panger Imchen ‘the church and the state go hand in hand without contradiction.’ He also pointed out that just as the traditional village councillors are chosen carefully, where the moral fibre of the person concerned is scrutinized, so too the men chosen to be in the Deacon board. He stated that the cultural tradition that has been adopted by the church is one based on the ancient ‘Putu Mender’ (Chungli traditional village government).

If we examine Panger Imchen’s comparative analysis, we find that much of what he stated is to a certain extent true for in numerous ways the Village Council and the church work in tandem. For example, when a Gaon Bura who is a public leader selected by his clan was caught stealing he was dismissed from the office of Gaon Bura and the church too excommunicated him. In the same token if a Deacon is fined by the Village Council, he will be summarily dismissed from the Deacon board. Christianity has not eroded the traditional customary laws and the traditional political institution of the village.

In other ways we find that the traditional customs have been adapted into the Christian rites. During Christmas for instance, some of the rich people give a community feast for the congregation after the church service. This is an adaptation of the ‘feast of merit’ that the Ao tribe practised in the olden days when a series of feasts were given to the whole village and it was only after the giving of such feasts that the giver of the feasts would have the privilege of wearing certain shawls and ornaments. In the christian era the giving of feasts does not entail any elaborate ceremonies or bestow on the giver any privilege of wearing certain shawls or ornaments, but the giver’s status is enhanced. Other traditional customs have also been adapted on some occasions. When a couple get married, although the ceremony is conducted according to the western christian rites, the families and clansmen of the bride and groom meet together to have the traditional meeting
between the two clans united by marriage. During funerals too the rites are conducted according to Christian tenets but during the funeral service the family members and clansmen and so on are given time to speak. During this part the closest relative addresses the deceased and says, 'go in peace, without looking back or remembering anyone, now for the water separates you from us.' ‘Looking back’ or ‘remembering’ by the deceased may cause another death in the family and this form of address is an ancient admonition to the deceased to move forward to the land of the dead. The ancient belief about the spirituality and immortality of the soul thus finds continuity through this ritualistic farewell, even though a new religion has replaced the old. Also in the funeral service another formality is observed if the deceased is a man. His nearest male relative (father/son/brother/uncle/nephew) announces to the gathering, “if unknown to us the deceased owes money or has any other commitment, please bring the matter to us along with evidence, within a stipulated time so that the debt can be settled.” In the absence of any documentary evidence, the testimony of witnesses is accepted for the settlement of such debts. Thus we find that traditional values have been adapted into the christian rites. The continuity of such traditions also highlights the importance and relevance that the people attach to traditional values.

References:
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7. *ibid* p. 35
8. *ibid.* p. 47
9. *ibid.* p. 48
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11. *ibid.* p. 50
12. *ibid.* p. 150
14. *ibid.* p. 3
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17. *ibid.* p. 4
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22. Smith, W. C. *op. cit.* p. 199
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25. *ibid.* p 98
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28. *ibid.* p. 178