CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Of late the study of religion and culture of the indigenous tribal people has been a matter of interest of scholars all over the world. Religion had the profoundest impact on the life of an individual and the society. Religion plays a central role in every society as they teach about ultimate claims on believers' lives providing a core vision which influence their socio-cultural aspirations and activities. The greatest transformation of any society in the history is brought about by religion. By studying the traditional religion of the Lothas we can draw remarkable values and guidance such as their whole system of being dominated and regulated by moral and ethical values. The spirit of democracy and mutual concern and mutual help is evident. There was a spirit of altruism, which was the ethical foundation of a communitarian society. Individual was not the primary subject but rather building up of a well-knit society extending help to the poor and needy and willing to live and die for the welfare of the community was their primary understanding.

The Lothas, before the advent of British colonizers and Christian missionaries were self-sufficient, independent, colorful people. Their society projected a great sense of community-based approach and a deep co-operative relationship among themselves. In every sphere of their life, be it political, social, economic and religious, they had the concept of togetherness and oneness. The society reveals elements of egalitarian social condition. It follows a democratic form of government, where the power of people is not in the hands of a single group but with the whole community. And yet, one could also imagine the dreadful environment of head-hunting in which they lived.
The Lothas were religious people from time immemorial with their own set of beliefs and practices. Their religious beliefs and practices were not formulated into systematic set of dogmas but teaching and learning systems existed which were simply appropriated into their way of life. Modifications were made according to the changes relating to the needs of the people. They had no written tenets but the priests, elders and parents were the religious custodians. Religion permeated in all department of their life. There was no separation of the secular and the sacred. Among the Lothas, religion is so intertwined with their everyday life that distinction cannot be made between the sacred and the secular. Every dimension of their life is linked with the invisible world of the spirits. They believed that their existence on the earth is not in their hands but it all depended on the supernatural, and this feeling developed an attitude of fear towards the divine beings. Therefore, their religious belief is guided by efforts to appease the supernatural to get tangible results. Hence, their approach to religion is utilitarian and egoistic. It is utilitarian in the sense that they wanted to be on the safer side as far as the divine beings are concerned, as displeasing them may not be good for them. It is egoistic in the sense that preserving themselves from the wrath of the supernatural becomes their main religious concern. The study brings to light that the motives are obtaining food, victory over enemies, averting evil and illness. There is also a great deal of materialism inherent in their religion, because the motive behind their prayers and sacrifices are for obtaining material gains or favor from the deities. Again that is the reason why great care is always taken to appease the spirits to ward off their malignancy. The Lotha traditional religion aimed at life, fertility, prosperity, harmony between people and spirits, in this world rather than the next. There is also little speculation about the origin and nature of the cosmos.

Their belief and practices were guided by fear and superstitions. However, though fear is the basis of their religion, we also find that their attitude towards the Supreme Being is not one of
fear. They considered the Supreme Being as one who cared for them as a father would to his children, and attributes many moral qualities to him. The Supreme Being is the one they would call upon in all the significant moment of their life, and offer him prayers and thanks for his goodness. Moreover, throughout the different seasons and stages of life, they establish rituals and ceremonies to keep in touch with the supernatural. What people in the west would regard as typically secular, such as planting and harvesting crops, is closely connected to religious understanding among the Lothas. The fundamental concern of the Lotha religion with health and well-being are expressed through rituals. These religious ceremonies built up genuine bonds among the people of the village, clan and family. Festivals, feasts, dances and songs celebrate communal existence. Because religion focuses on communal well-being, the Lothas were not much concerned with eschatological concepts. For them the past and the present find their meaning in the present.

Since their religious activity focuses on how positive benefits for society can be enhanced, the Lotha traditional religion is a form of humanism, which is a communal humanism and not individualistic. Therefore, in spite of the limitations, there is also a great deal of richness in them. Though they are primitive in their nature and expressions, the Lotha religion is pragmatic, concerning themselves with securing and maintaining material advantages which promote the well-being of the community as a whole.

Thus, the traditional religion of the Lothas was not primarily for the individual but for the community of which he was a part of. Any activities that are harmful to the peace of the community and individual were regarded as inhuman activities and therefore deserved punishment. One can always draw remarkable values and guidance from the study of this traditional religion such as their whole system being dominated by and regulated by moral and ethical values. In this religion there is the spirit of mutual concern and mutual help.
This traditional religion of the Lothas which is termed as ‘Animism’ was supplanted by Christianity brought by the American Baptist missionaries. The people lived in isolation for centuries, and therefore out of general influence from other culture and religion until hundred and fifty years ago or so when their isolation was broken by the inroads of the British rule and the American Baptist missionaries. Their daily life which was encircled with taboos, superstition and sacrifices to gods and deities was replaced by the gospel. With the arrival of Dr Witter and his wife, the first missionaries designated to the Lothas, at Wokha in 1885, the process of evangelization of the Lothas began.

When the Christian missionaries came, there was initial formidable opposition from the animists to the new faith for several reasons. Their religion and the rites and rituals associated with it are a part of the socio-economic structure and a part of their everyday existence. Every individual adheres to religion by way of custom and practice rather than out of choice. For instance, festivals, feasts, building of the Chumpo (Morung), clearing of the village path, etc, among the Lothas require the participation of every individual in the society. All these were done with elaborate rituals and sacrifices to their deities. The Christian missionaries were uncompromising regarding the new converts participating in any animistic ritual. Violation of the traditional rituals and customs made the villagers fear ill luck, and called for punishment. The village not willing to risk the ire of its Gods was often instrumental in the exodus of the Christian converts of a village and thus to founding of new ones. Moreover, the entire social structure was dependent on the economic self sufficiency of the villages. The people depended on agriculture for their subsistence. Agricultural success and good harvests depended on the whims and caprices of the Deities and spirits most of whom were malignant by nature and whom, the villagers could not afford to offend. The village could never allow any individual to offend the spirits, for the repercussion would be
felt by the entire village. Therefore, when misfortune came to the villages, the Christian converts were blamed that by bringing a new faith to the villages they offended the spirit.

Gradually, because of the zeal and dedication of the pioneer missionaries converts grew. Here, the native Lotha evangelists played an important role in reaching the people and gaining converts. They carried their own food, went from village to village preaching the gospel. Most of them read up to class 4 or 5 and were not well trained and their understanding of the Bible was poor. They used very simple method of teaching but because of their dedication and commitment to the gospel, the Lothas were evangelized. Preaching in the local dialect also helped them to reach out to the people and gain converts. As the converts grew in number, Churches were established. From a humble beginning of the first Church established at Okotso village in 1904, the Lothas can take pride of the 121 churches under the banner of the Kyong Baptist Ekhumkho Sanrhutysu KBES (The Lotha Baptist Churches Association) at present.

Despite overwhelming odds the early missionaries rendered yeomen’s services to the Lothas in reclaiming them from the primitive lives. The introduction of the new religion brought tremendous changes in the character and habits of the Lothas. They learnt the value of peace, tolerance and peaceful co-existence with their fellow-men and neighbors. They recognized the value of education, sanitation and better living conditions. Christian values of universal brotherhood and the growth of education had widened their outlook, and better economic opportunities. The advent of Christianity gave a powerful push to the wheel of social change and the Lothas had taken a long stride ahead. The Lotha population is now predominantly Christians, though a countable number of the inhabitants of the villages still follow the old religious practice.
From the very beginning the American Baptist Missionaries saw the value of education to serve the purpose of evangelization. Mission through education became one of the most effective means of evangelizing among the people. What this pre-literate tribe needed first of all was a written script that the Bible might be translated to their own language. The next task was to start schools to educate the people in order to make them understand the Bible. Although the missionaries originally started schools in order to help with the missionary work, eventually these institutions benefited the region in many areas. An important aspect was the significant transformation of the Lotha society which was brought about by the new faith and modern western education. The many initial problems confronting the missionaries in the field of education were met and overcome with tact and perseverance. There was formidable opposition from the Lotha animists when it became evident that the missionary teaching was adversely influencing the students and eroded the Lotha traditional values. However with their demonstrated dedication and gospel of love, the missionary education attracted the people gradually. It resulted in inculcating discipline, self-reliance and cleanliness. Education also promoted building of personality and leadership in every sphere of the Lotha society—religious, political and professional. Education has enabled the Lothas to know more about others as well as themselves.

The popularity of the mission schools made them the main educational institutions for the Lotha children. It was in the mission schools many Lothas were educated and trained who later became pastors, evangelists and teachers in their own villages. The Lothas can also take pride at the long list of social and political leaders who once filled the rolls of the schools run by the missionaries. The Lotha people became more conscious and receptive towards education in the following years after the establishment of the Mission schools and cooperated with the Government in opening schools in their area. To a great extent the sincerity of the Lotha people helped the progress of Education. The people readily constructed school
buildings, hostels and staff quarters free of cost with available local materials along with all possible help. Education played the role of an eye-opener as well as upliftment of the people. Their response to education was quite positive. It was through the initiation and participation of the people that went a long way in development of education in the area.

At present, although the percentage of literacy is high, the benefits of education have not reached well interior. The high literacy rate had also resulted in acute unemployment problem among the Lotha youth. On the other hand, the ever growing non-local migrant population has comfortably slotted itself in into the vacuum left open by the local populace whether it is in trade and retailing, loading and unloading, construction or even the service sector. The age old value of dignity of labor, seem to have eroded in their society. There is a need to understand that apart from Government employment, there are many sectors where one can obtain gainful employment – private schools and institution, NGOs, Churches etc. There is an emerging and urgent need for the policy makers to initiate programs where vocational courses are imparted along with awareness opportunities where stakeholders are inculcated with work culture and dignity of labor.

There is also broad division of the Lotha society into two sections- the educated town dwellers and the illiterate cultivators. The former shows preference for white collared jobs.

With modernization and education, the Lotha society shows a trend of rural to urban migration. Majority of the people prefer to settle in down in the urban areas as they feel that urban areas offer better quality of life, with availability of better health services, better education facilities, better transport and communication facilities, better employment and income generation avenues and better entertainment amenities in the urban areas. Thus the idea of higher standard of living coupled with lure of material possession changed some of the finest aspect of the Lotha life and society.
The impact that modern Education had on Lotha women is tremendous. Before the coming of Christianity and Education, the position of the women in the community was not an enviable one. The men gave their time to fighting and hunting, leaving all the rest of the work to be done by the women. They were under the absolute authority of their men-folk and had few civil rights and no possessions. Such a war culture promoted a patriarchal society. Many of the deliberations of the village council involved matters related to warfare and defense in which women were not involved. In this situation the women folk were relegated to the household chores and did not participate in decision making. Eventually, the attitude towards women’s status was also determined by these factors. They were the ‘weaker’ sex and always had a subordinate status. However, progressive modernization brought on by the adoption of Christianity and modern education has gradually altered the contemporary situation of the Lotha women and they have begun participating in diverse modern activities. Her role is now not limited to the home as was in the traditional society but also outside the home.

The Lotha women are hard working and industrious. In fact, it is on these long cherished ideals of hard work, dignity and perseverance that a new age of womanhood is ushering in as an inevitable sequence to modern education. They have started realizing their position and status in the society and explicitly or implicitly started to assert equal status with their counterparts. Though the modern system of education sought to educate the people away from the traditional cultures, the enlightened women realized not to disregard their traditional settings. They continued to be the socializers of the young folks into indigenous tradition and have passed their values on to the next generation. To this end, the Kyong Eloë Hoho (Lotha Women Organization) and other women societies of Wokha district focus on the preservation and popularization of the traditional costumes, serving as a platform for the ladies to explore and exploit their talents and skills besides advancing the problems faced by women folk in
general. Because of their very hard working nature they have a great contribution in income generation in addition to their role as a carrier and transmitter of their rich culture. They learnt to take the best from the two situations, that is, traditional and modern, and therefore maintained the mechanisms both for adaptation and for encouraging the continuity of traditional cultures in the modern age.

Education has offered new options for the women that had contributed to a change of roles. This is evident especially in the public spheres. Whereas, women traditionally were totally excluded from the exercise of authority in this sphere, today at least some have come to occupy important positions in the politics and the professions. The Lotha women have made remarkable strides in their status towards equality with men in their society. The high rate of literacy among women is an encouraging trend. In terms of proportion it may not be so much but within the district there is at least one village viz. N Longidang which has women village council members and at least two instances in New Tssori and zuxeshe where women are VDB secretaries. These are encouraging signs of gender advancement.

With the introduction of the British rule and the Christian teaching of love and brotherhood, the practice of head hunting became a thing of the past. It was replaced by a harmonious relationship among the hitherto warring villages. The spirit of reconciliation became apparent by the absence of further internecine conflicts in the area.

Beginning from the arrival of the first missionary in 1885 to the present day, the Lotha society had undergone transformation in many ways. From a near static society, it has become a modern society in a state in a short time with its dynamics intensified. By inculcating modern education, the missionaries worked toward changing the life style and habits of the people and to adopt western styles. Since Christianity came from the west, it came with westernization of the people. Once the missionaries started the work among the Lotha people, not only Christianization but also social transformation was aimed at. The tribe’s religious
customs and practices were considered superstitious and devil-dominated, which they had to abandon when they accepted the Christian faith.

Missionary work has brought beneficial changes in the Lotha society. Education, improved health, dispelling of ignorance and unfounded superstitions and fear, inculcation of rationality of outlook and economic changes have resulted. Training of local people in the organizational work of the church, imparted by the Christian missionaries has contributed vastly to improvement of standards of efficiency among the Lothas. Christianity had introduced rationality and simplicity in the Lotha religious beliefs. However, the contact with the west which came with Christianity was a mixed blessing. With the numerous benefits they derived from contact with the European and outsiders from the mainland, they also received contamination. For instance, although the Lothas consumed large quantities of Soko (rice beer), the habit of drinking wine and spirituous liquor was formerly unknown. It was introduced to them by the Europeans. There is a growing addiction, especially among the educated urban dwellers. The Nagaland Baptist Churches Council (NBCC) concerns with this issue led to the introduction of the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act 1989 (NLTP) and accordingly Nagaland was declared as a dry state in June 1989.

In the early years, the missionaries had an ambivalent attitude towards the Naga indigenous culture. Their dedication to the people was also blended with a strongly critical view of the traditional religion and the various cultural practices with conscious or unconscious feelings of superiority in their relation with the heathen. The American Baptist missionaries were products of the early 19th century when the western nations were vigorously expanding on the globe and western imperialism was in its prime. The feeling of cultural superiority was a by-product of the political supremacy and economic prosperity enjoyed by the western nations which reflected itself in missionary attitude as well.
There was gradual assimilation of a foreign-western culture. This was affected through education and Christianity leading inevitably to the erosion of Naga culture. The people discarded their primal animistic religion when confronted with the new faith that is Christianity. In time, acceptance of Christianity made them more and more amenable to western culture. Thus, a more revolutionary and abiding impact on their culture and ethos were made by the American missionaries. Besides, other recent factors which led to the change of life style of the people like modernization and globalization cannot be ignored. One by product of these factors is the rise of popular culture which is a challenge to the Naga culture and tradition. Looking at the present scenario where the globalizing factor has great impact on any society the Lothas are not lacking behind. In all aspect their society is going through the inevitable historical phase of change where the old is replaced by the new. Change is inevitable because society is dynamic, not static. It would not be logical to try to isolate the tribe from the influence of the dominant culture, the media and the entertainment industry. Their society would then be left in denial and left behind in the Global rat race for development and modernization. But this change must not uproot the people’s identity and culture completely, because the moment they shy away from their roots they lose their identity.

Today, it is heartening to see that efforts are being made to preserve the Naga cultural heritage. A spirit of renaissance has been developing especially among the educated young generation who are taking responsibility of spreading awareness among the people, ironically made possible by modernization and Globalization where bridges are made across the world through the technological achievements.

There is also a general awakening of in-group consciousness, some common forms of manifestation of which are political awareness, search for identity, revival of indigenous
culture and resurgence of old values. The primary motive behind the introduction of modern education was basically the outcome of the necessity to protect and advance their interests, ie, evangelization for the Missionaries and colonial administration for the British. Besides they held the civilizing responsibility which is known as the “white Man’s burden” as their shared goal. But what the Lothas had gained through this agency is that it has awakened among the people the consciousness to protect their rights, and also to preserve their distinct identity through widening of their mental and geographical horizons. Of late there is a clear call by traditionalists to re discover the rich Naga heritage and to educate the masses, particularly the young and western educated Nagas so that freedom and independence, which is the condition of historical facts and socio-cultural identity of the Nagas can and will continue to be the aspiration of all Nagas.

Along with all the blessings, Christianity and modern education has been as devastating as it has been enlightening. It undermined much that was good and valuable in the traditional way of life of the people. The more educated they became the more alienated they began to feel from the traditional way of life which seemed obsolete and primitive. The study takes note of the disruption of important characteristics of the Lotha forefathers’ village life some of which were the Chumpo (Morung), the Osho (Feasts of merit) and the agricultural festivals.

The introduction of modern education disrupted the indigenous system of learning and redirected them to the new pattern of modern western education, which in turn had substantial influence on the socio-cultural life of the Lothas. The Chumpo, the traditional learning institute of the Lothas was a hallmark of the village in the bygone days. It is not even a hundred years ago, that it was considered as the storehouse of knowledge. The advent of modern education has completely changed the course of the traditional education system. It has been replaced by modern educational institutions. Along with the extinction of the system
many important skills and values are discarded. Besides the skills imparted for self-reliance, important values of life learnt in the Chumpo are hard work and dignity of labor, serving the community, civic sense and respect for elders. The opportunity to earn money in the Government services made many educated Nagas less industrious. In the present trend, the urgent need facing the Lothas is to try to inculcate some of the education system of the Chumpo (Morung) in the present educational curriculum. This not to back-tract ourselves to the ancestral era, or this should not translate as anti-western education system, but should be read as improvising the basis of education in which the present system can beautifully blend with some authentic traditional mode for training every citizen, especially the younger generation.

Modern education comes with technical and mechanical wonders, but the traditional methodology of processing raw materials into finished goods manually should not be led to become obsolete. The traditional craftsmanship is fast becoming a forgotten trade. It can be argued that in the wake of modernity and scientific illumination, the Lotha youth cannot look back to the traditional system for education and be built up to the full potential to face the competitive world. It also needs to be understood that Modernization and Globalization are inevitable phenomena and in order to catch up in the rat race of modernity, the world view needs to change. However training the young with the basic traditional values and skills will greatly benefit them as individuals and as a society in many aspects. By doing so the children would learn to be self-reliant and at the same time retain some important faculties of their tradition. Traditional story writing, folk song presentations, narration or enacting dramas based on the fore father’s life can help in keeping alive the cultural heritage, especially with the younger generation.
The next casualty of the onset of Christianity and modernization is the traditional practice of the Osho (Feast of merit). The performance of this feast was the hallmark of social distinction for a Lotha. There are a series of feasts, each one costlier than the preceding one. Each series necessitates the expenditure of large quantities of food-stuffs. For among the Lothas, a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of others. Every feast entitles the host to social distinction and increases progressively his standing and position in the community. It also entitles him to wear special dresses and ornaments and decorate his house in a particular manner, marking him out from others in the village.

This practice was prohibited by the British administrators and the American Baptist missionaries for several reasons. The British government saw the celebration of the feast of Merit as a motivating factor for headhunting raids because of the system of dancing around the Menkitong (the head tree of the villages where heads of enemies are hung) during the celebration. Another reason was the extravagant expenses involved in hosting the feast. The British government saw that hosting of the feasts involved a huge waste of essential resources and thus they discouraged its observance. The missionaries also, on their part objected to the Feast of merit presumably because the animals consumed in their course are not just slaughtered but sacrificed with appropriate invocations of the spirits. The practice also contradicts with the missionaries’ rigid enforcement of teetotalism, for the feasts involved much drinking of soko (rice beer) and Merry-making.

By examining this practice it is learnt that the fundamental concern of the Lotha religion with the well being of the community, are expressed through rituals and ceremonies. The killing of animals for the rituals and ceremonies, the feasts, dances and songs which accompanied it all celebrates communal existence. No doubt, the series of the Osho ceremonies converts material wealth such as cattle, pigs, fowls, rice beer and rice into social
status. It is a means to climb the ladder of social recognition. But it is also a means for distributing wealth in the community. It shows that among the Lothas the accumulation of wealth was not for selfish or greedy motive but wealth was accumulated with idea of sharing. It adds beauty to the community life of the Lothas. Today the ceasing of this practice is of great loss, particularly the character of the whole community involvement in making fellowship and concern for the weak and poor.

The rich man who performs the *Osho* earns the title *Ekhyuo Ekhung* which means the one who boasts in victory. Here, the man ‘boasts in victory’ not for accumulating wealth for himself but for sharing his wealth with the community by way of lavish sacrifices and feasts, and thus earning respect and recognition from the people. There was competitive spirit to outdo their neighbors in the giving of feasts, which stimulated the rich to produce rice beyond the requirement of their household and to rear Mithun, bulls and pigs for slaughter. With every feast given, the host also acquired the right to receive increased share of meat whenever another neighbor gave a feast. This system of reciprocal gifts made for the smooth distribution of perishable food.

This socio-religious activity focuses on how positive benefits for the community can be enhanced, and therefore it is a form of humanism, which is a communal humanism and not individualistic. Today, individualism has replaced the essence of communitarian aspect that prevailed in the Lotha society. Therefore, the rich themes of sharing and values of community life contained in the traditional celebration of *Osho* can help the Lothas as they advance into post modernity. The attempt here is not to encourage the Lothas to revive the actual practice of the rituals and sacrifices of the *Osho*, but the focus is to try to derive the valuable themes inherent in it and to use it to establish a community of love, peace and equality.
In the days of yore, when the forces of nature and hostile neighbors dictated the existence of each village, it made sense to rely on divine intervention, to be in awe of stones, trees, rivers, animals and formless spirits, to appease the malevolent spirits and seek the blessing of the benevolent ones for a healthy lineage and a good harvest. The Lotha festivals thus began as a propitiation of the spirits involving rituals and sacrifices. Throughout the agricultural year, the Lothas celebrate a number of festivals such as *Tokhu Emong, Pikhuchak, muthan Ratsen, Ronsi, Ethan tssopho* etc. Among these the *Tokhu Emong* is the main festival. It is the festival of thanksgiving for bumper harvest and blessing throughout the year. The festivals are marked with colorful songs, dances and feasts but the most important aspect of these festivals is the community bonding. Surviving where danger was the biggest challenge, these festivals were a time to cement the unity of the community and also reach out to the adjoining villages. These festivals helped the young and old to take the fellow-feeling to a higher level with practices such as eating and drinking together irrespective of social and economic status, visiting the houses of friends and relative, clearing the village path and erecting fences around the village. The spirit of giving and sharing is inherent in these festivals. For instance, during the festivals, a kitchen without meat is considered a taboo because it reflected an uncaring community, and a community that did not share its resources had no dignity. Thus giving was a part of the Lotha way of life. However, discouraging these community activities led to individualism among the new converts. Wealth was now hoarded and sold in the market giving rise to the first form of capitalism. Moreover, the very essence of unity and bonding is increasingly been replaced by individualism among the Lotha. Today, the principle of communitarianism is being crept by the ideology of individualism and the essence of community bonding and sharing that prevailed in the lives of the Lothas is fading to a great extend.
The lohas living simple lives for centuries together in his natural habitat with little knowledge about the outside world had rocketed its way from a pre-literate past to a modern present within a matter of hardly one hundred and fifty years. Modern Education and the inevitable phenomena of modernization and globalization have drastically changed all aspect of the Lotha life for the better or worse. It can only be concluded by saying that at this juncture the only task now is to ensure that the best of the old does not disappear in the zest for the new. A new faith, education and economic prosperity would lose all meaning if the cultural and spiritual foundations of the society are completely forgotten.

The advent of Christianity, the spread of education and the opening up of the district, the easy means of communication, and the way of life which has to be oriented to the demands of the modern age have helped the people to assimilate many changes. The dilemma with which the Lotha tribe is faced at present is to retain its cultural identity and yet to keep pace with other technologically advanced parts of the country.