

Chapter-5

Conclusion

It is necessary to take a look at the back-drop of Christianity in Nagaland before making an assessment on the traditional society of the Angamis or the Nagas as a whole. The Angamis and the Nagas in general were followers of an indigenous faith system based on a spiritual bonding with nature. Although broadly called animistic, animism does bring out the deeper relationship between human life and nature and the bond of spirituality between them. The arrival of Christianity introduced a sea-change in the religio-social life of the Angamis as well as the Nagas in general. At present, most of the Angami Nagas have adopted Christianity though there are some who have still retained their old faith and they are present in old villages like Khezakenoma, Viswema etc. The evidence of the disappearance of the old religion is seen in the celebration of festivals like *Sekrenyi*. Most of the festivals are no more celebrated. As narrated by Lhoutsüvi Paphino from Pfuchama village, there are only few to very less number of festivals which are celebrated today. He further commented on the Angami folksongs stating that today's youth cannot be blamed for their inability to sing or learn about folksongs when old people like him barely knows how to sing folksongs anymore. One significant problem that has been noticed during the fieldwork with each individual interviewee is the problem of remembering the folksong. Most of the time an individual is unable to sing alone and requires a group to sing confidently. According to Walter J Ong,

Learning to read and write disables the oral poet, Lord found: It introduces into his mind
The concept of a text as controlling the narrative and thereby interferes with the oral
composing processes, which have nothing to do with texts but are 'the remembrance of
songs sung' (58)

As stated in the previous chapters, some versions of folksongs are already made available in printed forms. The problem with the folksong recorded in texts is that such preservation has rendered them incapable of remembering the way a particular folksong is sung. A close observance in the tune of the folksongs, immediately display the differences from western songs. For an individual who has not grown up in a village learning to sing or get their ears accustomed to listening to folksong, it is a challenge to try and learn it later on because the tune itself becomes difficult to grasp due to its distinctive nature. Even though the spread of Christianity is held responsible for wiping out most of the traditional and cultural beliefs and practices, one cannot ignore the fact that various inhumane social practices like headhunting has come to an end. It was through Christianity that education was also introduced along with the faith in Jesus Christ.

The Nagas in their primitive setting did not have access to any type of formal education.

In such circumstances, western modern education was introduced by the British with the help of the Christian missionaries. In fact, it was particularly aimed at training the natives for the service of colonial administration, to pacify them and to alter their mindset towards the so-called modernity. With this aim in mind, they encouraged the missionaries to establish schools in different areas, which was a leap towards the transformation of the Nagas. (Puthankudy 109)

Before Christianity arrived, the Angamis believed in a supreme being known as *Ukepenuopfü*. This Supreme Being has no body structure and nobody has seen him. So the new faith in Christianity as introduced by the Britishers, gave structure to their perception about God.

To many Nagas, Christianity has brought them from darkness to light, from uncertainty to inevitability, from denunciation to salvation. (Maitra 149)

The Naga society today is flooded with the western standard of lifestyle and fashion. The youngsters on the streets in towns are influenced by modern western celebrities. With the advancement in technology, even the most remote villages in Nagaland are gaining access to the knowledge of the modern world. This in turn had affected the society at large especially in terms of preserving one's own culture and tradition. Also the accessibility of improvised communications and markets has led to the import of goods ranging from the latest cosmetics to the latest fashion in the market. In matters of clothes and dressings, the western culture has dominated the society. Traditional attires are worn only during festivals and important events or celebrations. Folksongs have almost entirely disappeared. Nowadays Christian hymns have taken the place of folksongs. Nevertheless, when we carefully look into the Christian hymn books as stated in chapter 4, we can still find songs with gospel meanings but retaining the tune and structure of folksongs. Perhaps this is culture undergoing changes and adapting to suit the present environment. Not many remember or are equipped with the knowledge of how a folksong is sung anymore. The Nagas and the Angamis in particular paid a heavy price for embracing Christianity and accepting the modern styles and ways of living.

The destruction or disappearance of morung or *thehuba* forms the main contributor towards the decline of the oral tradition. With the decline of the oral tradition, the transmission of traditional and cultural knowledge has been affected. Educational institutions and churches have taken up the place of the morung and *thehuba*. The youngsters no longer spend time in the dormitories to learn about the skills for survival or songs and tales of old. Instead we see everyone, not just the youngsters absorbed in the world of technology i.e smart phones. The picture is clearly seen everywhere in programs held or activities conducted in churches. For instance, after Easter or Christmas celebration the church usually hosts a gathering at night where bonfires are made and there is merry making. Even in such gatherings, the participation has become extremely poor. Not to judge but the picture of the

participants in the merry making itself, has become a disappointment where we see almost everyone engrossed and deeply immersed in the bright screen of their smart phones. This technique of being present bodily but absent in mind hampered the social interaction in small and big ways.

The institution of *morung* which symbolise a place of learning and ritual centre but with the introduction of Christianity and education, the *morung* has turned into a thing of the past. The youngsters no longer gather in the evening to learn about folksongs and folktales. Not only this but the oral tradition through which cultural heritage was passed on from one generation to the next, has almost disappeared. Dr. Lanungsang in his book *Working System of Arijū in Traditional Ao Society* remarks that the glory days of the Ao civilization came to a halt with the close of the *Arijū* (Morung) institution. Holding the church responsible for it as well, he added that it failed to organize the institution

in the form of Christian hostels at different levels. It was excellent towards making a total human being. The *Arijū* was the centre of value education too. (30-31)

The disappearance of the *morung* adversely affected not only the society but the youngster at large. The church in its worship failed to incorporate traditional songs and dances but replaced it with western and Indian songs.

There is a great deterioration in discipline and orderliness particularly among the young.

That is why maximum number of dropout youth occurs in their society today. Many young men and women are found loitering in every village aimlessly. When night falls, they find no proper shelter with proper guardian. During the daytime, they spend most valuable hours doing hardly anything. These are the results of the downfall of *Arijū* the system of the society. (Lanunungsang 86)

The attitude of the Christian missionaries towards the cultural and traditional practices of the Nagas, were mostly negative. The missionaries thought that the morung was the devil's altar and associated it with different reasons which ultimately brought an end to the institution of morung. The church and the educational institutions took up the place of the morung and we can rightly say that the disappearance of such important institution in a society brought an end to the oral tradition. The younger generation lost touch with their culture and the older generation kept the knowledge to themselves until it was enquired upon. So this lack of narration or lack of regular telling of stories and songs led to the forgetting of valuable traditional knowledge. This hindered the oral tradition followed by the Nagas. The festival of merit which was abolished by the Christian missionaries considering it to be unsuitable for Christian followers deprived tribal life of its traditional vigour and gave way to individualism.

The Christianity encourages individualistic attitude whereas the Nagas were accustomed to community living. J.P. Mills very correctly observed 'An animist puts his village before himself. A Baptist puts himself before his village.' (Maitra 153)

Beside the morung, most festivals which form an important aspect in the Naga cultural life were abandoned. And it is only during festivals that folksongs, folkdances, rituals and ceremonies are revived. Though some of the important festivals are still being celebrated, this has not proved sufficient to retain the cultural and traditional knowledge. When we look upon the present Angami society, we can observe that the one or two tribal festivals like *Sekrenyi* and *Khoupfunyi* have been reduced to singing a few traditional songs and wearing traditional attires. The festivals have lost its essence, its meaning, significance and value. The traditional attires which forms a part of their identity, indicating their status in the society is replaced by the western concept of fashion.

The Naga society in the process of becoming modernized has put their culture and tradition at a risk of extinction. The performance of traditional songs and dances have been forbidden and replaced by Christian hymns. According to T. Ngakang, in his article 'Musical Culture of the Nagas', he describe the Europeans missionaries view on the music of the Nagas as a manifestation of something which is uncivilized and pagan and also referred to it as a hurdle or hindrance towards the path of true faith. The European missionaries disregarded the culture and tradition of the Nagas and decided to adopt spreading the gospel as its main priority.

However, on taking a closer look at the hymn books used in churches nowadays, one can find that some Christian hymn books does include gospel songs incorporating folk tunes. This research does not aim to condemn Christianity or study the difference among different congregation under Christianity. This proves the survival and preservation of folksongs through changes and its adaptation to modern society.

Major changes were introduced into the society with the advent of Christianity. Though there were accounts of the first Christians facing discrimination at the hands of their own villagers, later on, as the number of converts increased their new found faith in Christianity began to erase most of the traditional values and beliefs. Rather than acting as a unifying force, Christianity has failed to rid the society of imbalances, loss of traditional and Christian values etc. Among the many principles of the traditional teachings, respect towards the parents and village elders carry great importance. With the decline of the *thehuba* (morung) and gazing upon the present modern Angami society, respect towards parents and village elders have considerably declined. According to the custom of the Angamis, it is considered *Kenyü* for an elder to wish a younger man or woman first. It is the duty of the young people to wish their elders first. But the present generation has failed to preserve the valuable traditional custom and teachings of the community. Another important factor

responsible for failure in preserving the folksongs is language. The Angami Nagas speak in *Tenyidie* language which is their native dialect. It was recorded in the book *Ura Academy Dze* that the Christian missionary CD King and his wife established a school in Kohima known as the mission school in 1882 and introduced *Tenyidie* as a subject in 1884. As mentioned in the chapter of the thesis, though a number of tribes come under the umbrella term of *Tenyimia*, there are variations of dialects even among the same tribe.

Even though *Tenyidie* has become a subject of the academic syllabus under NBSE (Nagaland Board of School Education) for a long period of time, the educational institutions emphasises on using English as the medium of education. Beside the English language, *Nagamese* which is considered as the ‘language of the street’ poses a threat to the native dialect. *Nagamese* is considered to be the broken version of Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. The *Nagamese* language has made it easier for the Nagas belonging to different tribes to communicate and understand each other. Despite its usefulness, there is a danger in the over use of the *Nagamese* dialect. Families living in towns often use *Nagamese* dialect even for family conversations. The encouragement of using one’s own dialect for communication with one’s own people is often not seen in most families. The youngster of today’s generation takes pride in adopting *Nagamese* dialect for interaction. Many a times, we can take note of how the students in high schools and higher secondary institutions interact mostly in *Nagamese* at a very young age. The use of one’s own native dialect is not much emphasized and this has led to the loss of understanding one’s own dialect.

According to the article “UNESCO says Nagaland’s Tenyidie language is engendered. What’s next?” by Medolenuo Ambrocia, she quotes Professor Kuolie, who has written seventeen books in Tenyidie dialect that “Our Naga intellectuals or the educated class have become illiterate to their mother tongue. It is not their fault. It is the fault of the situation and the progress of the society.”

The loss in understanding one's own dialect indirectly hampers the preservation and transmission of folksongs. Folksongs nowadays are mostly sung only during major festivals like the *Sekrenyi* festivals or some big important event in towns or villages. Not every participant in singing the folksong possesses knowledge of the song. In most cases, the singers are selectively picked and then taught with sessions of practices for the important event. An elder is appointed to teach folksongs to the young singers and in this manner it is transmitted or passed onto a group. The individual memory of the song is passed onto the collective memory with the help of social interaction.

Most of the time, the folksongs are learned without understanding the meaning and depth of the lyrics. This forms another reason as to why the young people are uninterested in learning folksongs. Many young people do not remember any folktales or understand the meaning behind the design and colours of their traditional attires. The assimilation of other culture due to mass media diluting the essence of their beautiful culture is on the rise. As Amenla Jamir says "There is nothing wrong in it, but believing that wearing western clothes transforms a person into a modern human is a mistaken ideology"

Despite all of these shortcomings, several attempts have been made to preserve the traditional knowledge. The textbook of Nagaland Heritage Studies for high school students as part of the academic syllabus has gradually enhanced the cultural and traditional knowledge among the young learners. Over the recent years efforts have been made in preserving the oral tradition of the Nagas using different platforms. One such examples of promoting oral tradition is the Nagaland folktale storytelling competition recently held in the year 2021 where high school students actively participated in the event and uploaded videos on Youtube. Nevertheless in the area of folksongs, no much research has been done and no much effort has been given in preserving it. Folksongs are not taught in any educational institutions but there are music academies to learn vocals and play western musical

instruments. It is time for the Nagas to wake up and realize that the disappearance of folksongs from the memory of the people will eventually lead to a partial loss of one's own identity.

Works cited

Ong, Walter. J. *Orality and Literacy*, Routledge, 1982.

Puthankudy, Sojan. *Echoing the Gospel*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2020.

Maitra, Kiranshankar. *Nagaland Darling of the North– East*. Mittal Publications, 1991.

Lanunungsang, A. “Working System of Arijū in Traditional Ao Society: Socio-Cultural Institution”, in Venuh. (ed.), *Naga Society: Continuity and Change*, Shipra, 2004.

Jamir, Amenla. Nagas and Modernisation: Are we losing our identity?. Morung Express, np, (2015).

Ambrocia, Medolenuo. UNESCO says Nagaland’s Tenyidie Language is Engendered.

What’s next? East Mojo, np (2021). <https://www.eastmojo.com>

Ao, Temsula. Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective. *Indian Folklife*, 22, 1-7 (2006).

www.semanticscholar.org