

# **RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS OF NAGA WOMEN**

Thesis submitted to Nagaland University in partial fulfillment for the  
award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the research data presented in this accompanying dissertation titled, "**RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS OF NAGA WOMEN**" has been carried out by Ms. Repasongla bearing Regd. No. 415/2010 under my direct guidance and supervision. The present work is original in its content and has not been submitted in part or full for any other degree or diploma in any other University/Institute.

It is further certified that the candidate has fulfilled all the conditions necessary for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy under Nagaland University.

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**DECLARATION**

I, Ms. Repasongla, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History & Archaeology.

  
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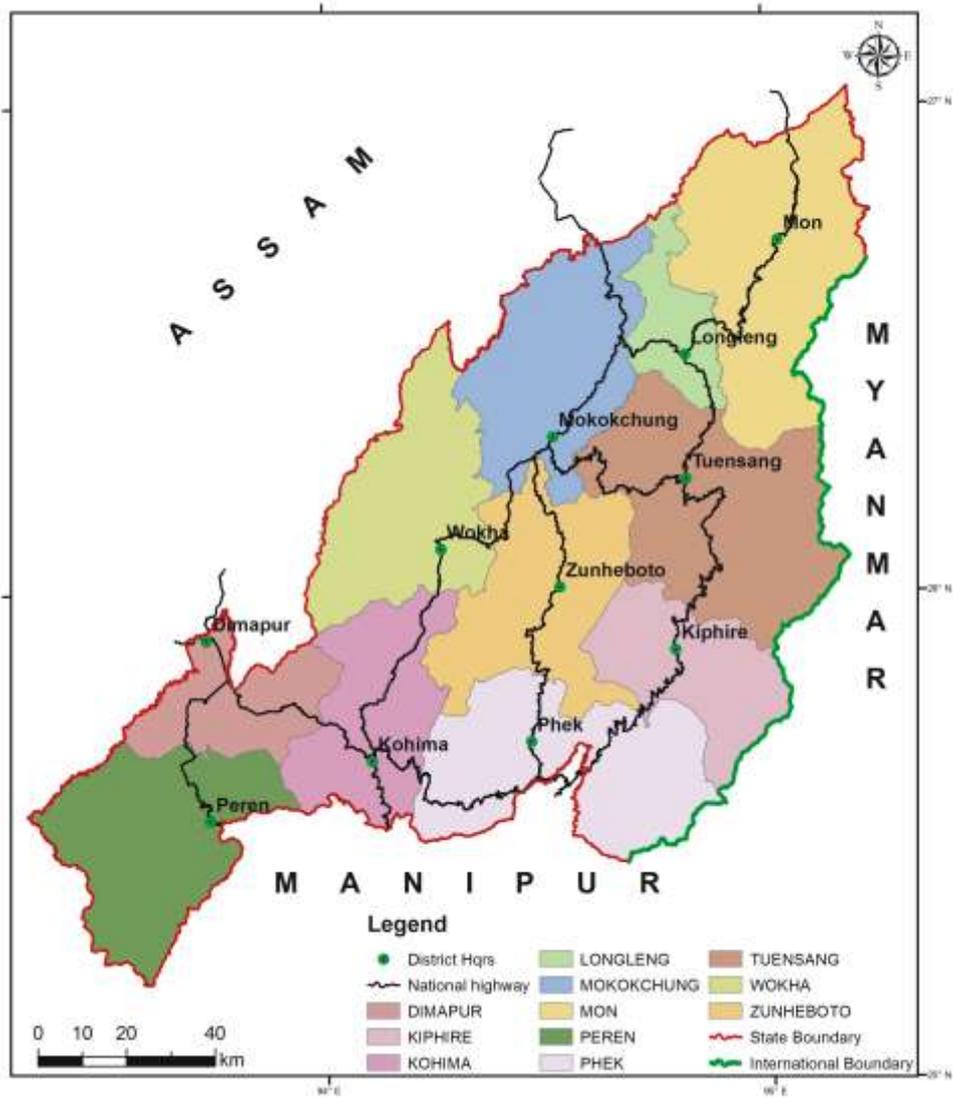


Figure. 1 Map of Nagaland indicating all the District Hqs

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The multi-faith, multi-culture study on “female sexuality and Bodily Functions in Different Religions” grew out of deep concern for women’s role and status and the inequalities experienced by women in most societies. The idea was born following the UN Mid-decade Forum in Copenhagen in 1980 and the world council of Churches for four-year study on the Community of women and men in the church. At the meeting a seminar on women and Religion attracted a large audience. Many participants in this seminar spoke of the impact of religious teachings on women, and expressed the desire to pursue those teachings and examine the extent to which they influence woman’s perception of herself and society’s perception of her role and status. Therefore, in preparation for the 1985 Forum of the UN Decade for Women in Nairobi, it was felt that knowledge about religious teachings which either inspired or reinforced social value was a necessary basis for promoting the participation of women in decision-making, and for recognizing their significant role and contribution to public life. It was noted that very often cultural taboos have been reinforced by religious teachings, or perpetuated by the absence of positive teaching. Unless these taboos are brought to light and the negative teachings are dealt with through reinterpretations of scripture and traditions, most projects attempting to ameliorate woman’s status would stop short of their objectives (Beacher, 1990: ix).

The international women year 1975 raised unexpected reactions in the church. This UN initiative was taken up by several religious organizations with conferences, consultations, round-table discussions, etc., and awakened interest in the church to find a solution to problems concerning the status of women in the church (ibid.: 179).

In every community, big or small, the institutions of social life grow and develop in their own way. As time passes, the way in which the community does things

become fixed. So the ruler which govern social behavior become the laws of the community or of the nation, and the way in which a country is governed becomes a fixed political system. These institutions may, of course, be changed, sometimes quickly, and sometimes slowly. In a similar way, every community builds up its own religion. Every religion includes the following elements:

- i. The beliefs of the community about God.
- ii. The beliefs of the community about God's relationship with the world.
- iii. The ways in which the people of the community worship and pray to God.
- iv. The rulers which the community follows because of their beliefs about God.
- v. The places and people which the community believes to be holy and to belong to God in a special way.

(Brown, 1987: 8).

### **1.1: Women in Religion: The Global scenario**

K.M. Warjri (1998) in his paper, 'Educational and Social Problems Faced by Women' remarks that most religion deny women the right to become leaders. Hence women are suppressed and have no role at all in decision making. Many religion whether Christianity, Hinduism or Islam have obedience laws which dictates the place and role of women within that particular society (Warjri, 1998: 8-9). In the Roman society, the faithfulness of the church, who come principally from a rural milieu, where traditions have remain unchanged for centuries, still consider it a sin for women to receive unction from the priest before men at religious services. And if she is standing near the priest by chance, the men around her try to prevent her preceding them for this last act of the service, even though some of the men have been standing outside and have just entered the church. Sometimes the priest himself invites the men to confession first, while women who come to the church long before the men are forced to wait their turn. This attitude is not confined to men, many women in the church prevent other women from going before the men. It is true that the clergy do not seem to be aware of this problem, but it is equally true that the orthodox Christian women do not

seem to raise the issue of discrimination to which they are subjected in the church (Beacher, 1990: 175).

As the role of women in the society at large has changed, religion has responded to the change in a number of ways. New professional roles in the Church and Synagogue have been opened to women, including in most mainline denominations, that of ordained clergy. On the other hand, some religious groups have taken the lead in opposing women's assumption of more public roles and also movement to free women from domestic roles. Women are ordained to priestly office in some major religious groups of the present time, as it was of several religion of antiquity. In Ancient Egyptian religion, the royal women wielded great power, and influence and were closely involved with the cult of *Amun*. The God's Wife of *Amun* was the highest priestess in the cult of *Amun*. The Divine Adoratrice was a priestess ranking slightly below the God's Wife and she may have served as a deputy or stand in for the God's Wife. The position of God's Wife was reserved for royal women while Divine Adoratrice could be held by non-royal women as well<sup>1</sup>. The Greek historian and traveler, Herodotus states, "No woman holds priestly office either in the service of the goddess or gods, only men are priests in both cases". However this is not strictly accurate, as it occurred frequently during various periods of Egyptian history that women seem to have been able to hold priestly offices, from the Old Kingdom onwards. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Queen Ahmose Nefertari, the Great Wife of Pharaoh Ahmose I, attained an exceptional position as Second God's Servant of *Amun*, a post she later exchanged under contract for a new title of 'Wife of the God' or 'the Adoratrice of the God'. The God's Wife of *Amun*, was one of the exceptions where women occupied a priestly role of high office, which became very important during later Pharonic period. The prominence and importance of God's Wife changes from dynasty to dynasty. During the time when *Amun* was pre-eminent, the queen would have enacted the role of his wife, the Goddess *Mut*. During the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty the title acquired a different use, and was transferred to a king's daughter, who now became the wife of the chief state god, *Amun-re* of *Thebes*. In the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, a further political dimension was added to the role, whereby the royal daughter and

God's Wife of Amun adopted, as her successor, the daughter of the next king. The position of God's Wife has extensive power, wealth and status, attached to it. On her enthronement as God's Wife of Amun, Ankhnerneferibe daughter of Psammetichus II, enacted function which had previously performed by the male 'First Prophet' of Amun. She was the first woman known to have held the title of 'First Prophet'. This indicates that there was a significant transfer of power to God's Wife and her retinue<sup>2</sup>.

In Greek society, women in most city-state of ancient Greece had very few rights and had no role in politics. However, women had a very important role as a religious priestess<sup>3</sup>. The priestesses were usually normal citizens, wives and mothers. In Athens always, the wife of the archonte-king, the queen, was regarded as a priestess and exerted an important religious role. The women are mainly attached to female divinities like Athéna, Déméter and Artémis. Certain festivals were exclusively reserved to them, like *Thesmophoria* celebrated in honour of Déméter Législatrice. The legitimate wives citizens only could take part in it and the ceremony was chaired by a woman. On the other hand, at the time of certain festivals like Dionysies or Adonies, they are rather the marginal women who were concerned. Priestess played a major role in the Eleusinian mysteries. The *Gerarai* were priestesses of Dionysus who presided over festivals and rituals associated with God<sup>4</sup>.

In Hinduism, the Vedas have volume to say about the women of the vedic period, who both complemented and supplemented their male partners. One of them was Gargi Vachaknavi, the earliest known sage from the Vedic period who composed several hymns that questioned the origin of all existence. She challenged the sage of *Yajnavalkya* with perturbing question of *Atma* (soul) during the Brahmajajna, a philosophic congress organized by King Janaka of Videha. Ghosha who wrote two entire hymns of tenth book. The other prominent figure was Lopamudra. According to the legend, she was created by sage Agasthya and was given as a daughter to King of Vidharba, who later got married to sage Agasthya. She wrote a hymn of two stanza making an impassioned plea for her husband's attention and love, which made the sage realized his duties towards his wife and performed both his domestic and ascetic

life with equal zeal, reaching a wholeness of spiritual and physical powers. The Rig Veda also has about 10 hymns, accredited to Maitreyi, the woman seer and philosopher. She contributed towards the enhancement of her sage-husband Yajnavalkya's personality and the flowering of his spiritual thoughts<sup>5</sup>.

In Islam, The Quran provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities. The Quran states: "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds" [Noble Quran 74:38]. It also states: "...So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female. You proceed one from another..." [Noble Quran 3:195]<sup>6</sup>. Quran is the unaltered word of God as revealed to Prophet Mohammed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century of Common Era. It is the primary source of Islamic jurisprudence. After Quran is the Sunnah, the prophet's example for guidance which consist of the Sira, biographies of prophet's life and Hadith, compilations of numerous records of the Prophet's sayings and actions<sup>7</sup>. Women in Islam are guided by the *Quran* and *Hadith* which is the primary Islamic sources of personal law. In certain regions, in addition to religious guidelines, pre-Islamic cultural traditions play a role. Islamic laws and cultural customs give an impact on various stages of Muslim women's life. But when it comes to relationship with God, there are no differences between men and women and they both receive same rewards and punishment for their conduct. *Salat* (prayers) are mandatory for women and she is allowed to go to mosque. There are many indications from the *sunnah* that when men and women prayed together, the Prophet explicitly ordered that women should pray behind the men. The primary purpose of this arrangement seems to be to keep women from having to undergo scrutiny by men as they are praying, but there may be other reasons. However, as Islam spread, it became unusual for women to worship in mosque because of fears of unchastity caused by interaction between sexes, which resulted in worshipping separately to avoid distraction during prayer. Within Islam women are not allowed to become an imam and take a religious service. Women's right to become *imam* (religious leader) however, is disputed by many. The term "imam" literally means "leader" in the Arabic language and is normally used to

signify a person who is a leader in some religious field or practice. The term "imam" also applies to the person who performs the function of leading a congregational prayer. Thus the fundamental role of imam is to lead the prayer. Generally women are not allowed to lead mixed prayers. There is a current controversy among Muslims on the circumstances in which woman may act as *imam*<sup>8</sup>.

In Christian society, women have traditionally been placed in a subordinate role within the church and within marriage itself. Historically Christian societies in Western Europe have not allowed women to take on senior roles within the church and have promoted the idea that women are meant to fulfill a more submissive role within their families. This is certainly the case amongst more conservative Christians and is particularly prevalent amongst American Evangelical Christians. The Catholic Church is perhaps the most significant church that does not allow women to become religious leaders and as in other areas of society, progress in women's rights has encouraged debate in religious communities as to the place of women within their religion<sup>9</sup>. Though, there are oppositions and debates on whether women should be permitted to play a prominent role in the Church, however, from the beginning of the early Christian Church women were important members of the movement. There are many prominent female figures in the Bible who had played a significant role. Karen King (1998) examines the evidence concerning women's important place in early Christianity. The mother of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, is perhaps the most high profile female figure in Christianity. Mary Magdalene, his disciple and the first witness to the resurrection; Mary and Martha, the sisters who offered him hospitality in Bethany. Even after the death of Jesus, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christianity, women continued to play a prominent role<sup>10</sup>. There are many women who were important agents to Paul as when he began his missionary movement. In his letters, Paul mention women such as Chloe, Priscilla (Prisca), Euodia and Syntyche as well as Phoebe. Chloe, a prominent woman of Corinth, appears to be the head of a household of an extended family. She and her household told Paul of the divisions in the congregation of Corinth (1 Corinthian 1:11). Priscilla is mentioned seven times in the Bible, as a missionary partner with the Apostle Paul. Phoebe, another woman

mentioned in Paul letters, He attaches to her three titles: *diakonos* meaning a deacon, sister, and *prostasis* meaning leader and president<sup>11</sup>. Outside of written religious sources there is also objective evidence to support women's prominent status and roles within the early Christian church. A second century letter of a Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, to Roman emperor Trajan, demonstrates that female servants were leaders in a church in Bythnia. Pliny wrote the letter, dated 112 C.E., asking for advice on how he should handle a situation where Christians were said to have been stirring up trouble. He said he captured and tortured two female maidservants called *deaconesses*. These women must have been considered important church leaders since the term was similarly applied to Phoebe in Paul letters<sup>12</sup>.

It remains a controversial issue to certain religion or denominations of Christianity where the ordination, the process by which a person is consecrated and set apart for the administration of various religious rites, or where the role that an ordained person fulfils, has traditionally been restricted to men. The traditional restriction might have been due to cultural prohibition or theological doctrine or both. The ordination of women has been a controversial issue in Christian churches, as while many Christian denominations have responded positively to modern views of gender equality, some traditionalist takes a more conservative view and opposes the admission of women into the priesthood. Christian views (attitudes and beliefs) about women vary considerably today and have varied even more throughout the last two millennia, evolving along with or counter to the societies in which Christians have lived. All of the major world religions, including institutionalized Christianity, deprecate women to some degree. Since the first century, organized Christianity has interpreted the Bible as prescribing a gender-based hierarchy, claimed up to the present by Complementarians and traditionalists to be scripturally mandated. The hierarchical theology has placed woman under the man's authority — in the church, in marriage, and elsewhere. Historically, it has excluded women from church leadership positions that give women any kind of authority over men. Only since the 1970s have more moderate views emerged, the Egalitarian<sup>13</sup>.

The Egalitarian interpretation of scripture brings them to the conclusion that the manner and teaching of Jesus, affirmed by the Apostle Paul, abolished gender-specific roles in both the church and marriage. The Christian Egalitarian based their view on one particular verse in the Bible, Galatians 3:28 that, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". This verse has been called by some the "Magna Carta of spiritual emancipation"; whereas, Complementarians, also known as Traditionalists or Hierarchicalists, interpret Galatians 3:28 differently from Christian Egalitarians. They understand it to refer only to equal availability of everyone to *salvation*. They claim that the freedoms offered in Christ do not apply to male-preference in marriage, the ordination of women, racism, or any other form of discrimination. Complementarians believe that male priority still exists as a requirement of scripture, they say, but the two genders are now described as having "complementary" roles in the church and home<sup>14</sup>.

Thus in the early period, from the ancient Egypt to early Muslim and Christianity, women played significant role in religion. However, Garga Ghista (2011) talking about the status of women in world religions mentions that every religion existing today discriminates in some way against women. For this she has picked five major religion of the world - Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, and examines what the scripture of every religion says about the status of women and the society in which that particular religion abounds analyzing on how the scripture has had impact on the status of women in practical life. According to her, the scripture of every religion today degrades women. Every scripture indicates to women that they are inferior to men. She added that it may or may not be the fault of the original prophet who founded that particular scripture. But it is for sure the fault of certain men who, later on over the decades and centuries, revised the text of those scriptures. Due to these old and outdated scriptures, and due to every man who has participated in perpetuating these scriptures, the untold tortures and sufferings of women everywhere have been boundless. These five major world religions were all founded thousands of years ago. Their scriptures and tenets were changed again and again over the centuries by men<sup>15</sup>.

Millions of women do not achieve their ambition due to feeling of inadequacy, lack of confidence and feelings of worthlessness. Women feel themselves as dumb and stupid when they compare their intelligence. There are some women who excel in life, who think more creatively than men, but when they are in an executive meeting or having some important discussions, they restrain themselves from sharing their opinions. They have better solutions and ideas but lack of confidence force them not to speak their mind. Many women killed their thoughts and wider understanding by themselves due to inferiority complex (Longchar, 1998: 43-44).

### **1.2: Women and Religion in Naga Society**

The traditional tribal religion varies as much as tribal customs or tribal laws do. Naga society is a patriarchal society in which women were often regarded as inferior to men and were kept at par with children and minors. The patriarchal family system possibly did not provide equal status to women. The (Naga) traditional religion seemed not a moral code, rather a system of ceremonies designed in the religious rites (Mills, 1973: 215). Priesthood, the highest post in religion has found a permanent place in the religious society of the Nagas, where the priest of the village community does every form of worship and sacrifices, if at all it is connected with the affairs of the village as a whole. However, in some small matters connected with single family, the father of the family is regarded as the priest and almost all the worship and sacrifices in the family is done by him. Women were never allowed to be a priest. She was not allowed to perform any rituals for the family or community in any events (Bendangangshi, 1993: 31). Women were not given prominent role in religious rites or sacrifices (Bendangyapang, 2004: 57). Life in the traditional Naga society was a continuous flow of festivals and ceremonies in which there were observation of religious rituals and women were debarred from performing any religious rites and rituals. Generally women and children were not allowed to the village common altar. Women could not become a priest or the head of the family. She could only assist her husband in family ceremonies where the husband acts as the priest and he performed all the sacrifices and rituals and (but) the presence of women was essential. She assisted her husband in all occasion by preparing all the necessary items to be used to

perform the sacrifices and worship successfully. In the case of a widow, she is entitled to perform any necessary sacrifices and rituals in her paddy field for good crops and rich harvest (Aier, 1998: 95; on a similar view, see Jamir and Lanunungsang, 2005: 218-219). This clearly depicts that women played an important role in traditional religious practices. The wife assisted her husband in all the religious rituals. Thus, women were indirectly involved in all the religious practices, but the initiatives were taken by men. There was no written law that restricts women to perform rituals but the norms and traditions that they followed, automatically put men into the role to perform rituals and no questions were raised from women for not giving them the opportunity.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an amazing growth of Christianity in Asia. It was a century of missionary zeal and expansion of the Church. North East India with its diversity, inaccessibility and problems of communication was no exception. This Christian Missionary with the expansion of the Church has opened up schools for tribal people. In the beginning, the parents strongly objected to the education of their daughter because of their old traditional cultural attitude that a girl will no longer contribute to the parent family when she is married.

Women today are venturing out of their four walls home and proving themselves to be equally good, if not superior, in all walks of life. They are standing in the threshold of a new era. Thus it should be realized that 'every issue is a women's issue'. Their contribution and role in the family as well as in the socio-economic transformation is pivotal and should not be under-estimated (Sinha, 1993: 6). Women are venturing out of their four walls home and their awareness of oneself and society is increasing. She contributes immensely for the growth and development of the society and her contribution are being noticed to some extent. Women status in the society seemed to be improving with modernity, but the age old traditional Naga customary law still denies her to participate in policy making and the right to inheritance. The role of women in the church has always been defined in large measures by the traditional role of women in society. The subordinate role they

played in traditional society was reflected in the role allowed to them by the men who control the society. The participation of women in the Church is more active and higher than men but the age old beliefs and practices that male dominate the society, does not seem to accept woman holding the highest post in the church, ever as Pastor. There are many well qualified and efficient women who could hold the highest post in the Church and few of them has been ordained by the Church authority, but the opportunity of holding the highest post is denied. It is denied not because women are unwilling to hold the post but because of the traditional attitude towards the appropriate role of women in the society whereby the status of women in a society is determined by prevalent ideals and functions. These ideals and functions are however, not universal. In some societies where women have economic rights equal to the rights of men, their status is not necessarily higher since at times they are made to share the men's activities in addition to the burden she carries. Rights alone do not determine the status of women; it also depends upon men's behavior towards them.

### **1.3: Gender Issues: The Global perspectives**

All societies assign certain activities to female and others to male. These worldwide gender patterns of division of labour may be explained by male-female differences in strength, by differences in compatibility of tasks with child care, or by economy of effort consideration and expendability of men. The role assigned to male and female have a clear cultural components, we speak of them as 'gender roles'. Women almost always have infant and child-care responsibilities; men in most societies contribute more to primary subsistence activities. But societies that depend heavily on gathering and agriculture, women contribute substantially.

When we look at what is gender and what do we mean by gender equality, the basics is that, people are born generally as either female or males and we see that through their physical characteristics. When children grow up they learn that there are different roles for females and males and that they are expected to conform to these roles. In other words one is born with their sex but it is through our cultural/church teaching that we become women and men. This then is what we call gender identity

therefore gender refers to the construction of identity by our society. It is this construction that defines for us what it means to be female and male. These roles assigned by our cultures seem so natural that we are tempted to believe that “that’s how it is supposed to be”. On the surface, this keeping of women and men in their place may seem fine and some of us can point to the advantages of the situation. One of the often cited advantages is that this system makes things easy, everyone knows their place and the rules which govern the relationship between women and men are clearly set out. However when the situation is examined through the lens of gender equality we find that beneath the surface of niceness is a system that favours men at the expense of women. It is a socio-cultural system that is characterized by inequality, where power belongs to men and the male child being valued more than the girl child. This male centric and rule by men is often referred to as patriarchy. Where there is inequality, there is injustice and injustice, has to be confronted and overcome if there is to be justice and freedom for all. In a situation of inequality, women experience exclusion as they are kept in the margins of society or marginalized as we prefer to say it. It is this exclusion that keeps the majority of women at the margins of society and leads to a situation where they are dependent on men<sup>16</sup>. Aier (2009) maintains that gender relations are the socially determined relation that differentiates male and female situation in the society and refers to that dimension of social relation that structures the lives of individual men and women. In gender context, women and men are socialized differently and often function in different spheres of the community. An emphasis on gender also highlights the power relation and privileges which is normally legitimized through various cultural denominators. As a result, men and women in every society occupy a different social space that defines their identity and social roles within the household or in the community. Consequently, they have different life experiences, knowledge, perspective and priorities. Cross cultural studies of these differences the world over have shown that, rather than being pre-determined or natural, almost all such perceived characteristics have been shaped and constructed by the society (Aier, 2009: 1).

In most societies, men are the leaders in the political arena, and warfare is almost exclusively man based activities. The relative status of women compared to that of men seems to vary from one area of life to another. To look into the gender issues and to bring equality, the United Nations has set up a Commission known as the Commission on Status of Women. The Commission on Status of Women (CSW) is a functional of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and is the principal of global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women everywhere. The Commission was established by ECOSOC on 21 June, 1946 with the aim to prepare recommendations and reports to the Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. Further, the Commission's mandate was expanded in 1987 by ECOSOC resolution 1987/22 to include the functions of promoting the objectives of equality, development and peace, monitoring the implementation of measures for the advancement of women, and reviewing and appraising progress made at the national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. Gender mainstreaming was endorsed as a strategy for promoting equality between women and men by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The United Nations Economic and Social Council adopted the agreed conclusions of 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system at the coordination segments on 18, July 1997. The ECOSOC 1997/2 thus states that "Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels, and as a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated, the ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality". The importance of gender mainstreaming strategy was reiterated by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session in June 2000. In 2004, the Council reviewed the implementation of agreed conclusions 1997/2. The most recent resolution on gender mainstreaming

was adopted at the 2006 substantive session of ECOSOC (council resolution 2006/36)<sup>17</sup>.

Despite all these initiatives on implementing gender equality by the United Nations at all levels there still persists inequality in the society and this inequality is not prevalent only in socio-economic, political and other social elements but it is prevalent in religion as well. Nantondo Hadebe while talking about 'Gender, Gender Equality, and the Church', opines that the topic of Gender and Gender Equality in the church often raises feelings of fear because issues of Gender, when taken seriously, have the potential for radical transformation, thus there is resistance. There are many reasons for this resistance but Nantondo specify on three main fears: fear of loss; fear of change and fear of the unknown. These fears are interlinked and sequential. When challenged with the issue of gender equality, the initial reaction is fear of loss which comes whenever the status quo is challenged, the feeling that "we will lose everything that we believed in". Following closely is the fear of change which comes when people get conscious and realize that things have to change which leads to the fear of the unknown "what will happen next?"<sup>18</sup>. Christianity which was a patriarchal society, placed men in the position of authority in marriage, society and government. According to the new testament of Bible, Christ appointed only male apostles. From the first century, women were not ordained to the priesthood but Christianity has developed monastic traditions which include the institution of the convent, through which women, as religious sisters and nuns have continued through history to be active, particularly in the establishment of schools, hospitals, nursing homes and monastic settlements. Thus men dominated society in the time of Jesus, though women were highly respected. In modern context, Christians have different attitude towards women, some believe that the old approach should still be maintained while others believe that this is too old fashioned to be adopted in modern world.

The exclusion of women from equal participation in society contributes to the oppression of women. The power of males over women is most clearly visible in all forms of violence against women. Women are vulnerable to violence at every state of

their lives from the time they are born to the time they die. The response of governments around the world, has been to legislate laws to protect women and include them into the socio-economic and political life of the nation. This has happened because women themselves have been their own liberators and have demanded justice. As women's voices become stronger and stronger, there will be more and more changes which will result in the transformation of society where gender equality will be the norm rather than the exception<sup>19</sup>. Schoefthaler (2006) commented that almost everybody agrees that pluralism, freedom of opinion and non-discrimination along differences ethnic or social origin, colour, gender, language, religion or any other beliefs are key elements of democracy. This broad acceptance of human rights, however, has not yet penetrated into the mentalities and does not interact much with the perceptions of differences. A recent study on the role of men and women in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue by the Council of Europe 2005 identifies a deeply rooted resentment in European societies also prevailing among organizers of dialogue event: the association of women with peace and tolerance and of men with war and violence. In recent years, the term 'gender' began to use in order to recognize social and cultural differences associated to men and women in society. Gender and cultural relation have many elements in common and also gender and cultural relation have also in common a number of options for change. Transfer of good practice in intercultural dialogue to gender relation is possible. There are also lesson learnt from gender relations which would be needed for intercultural dialogue. For instance the development of non-sexist language promoted and undertaken by public institutions, the media and professional organizations, is a success story for women organizations. Terminology changes makes people think and can induce changes in attitudes and behavior (Schoefthaler, 2006: 19-21). Shoefthaler also mentions that it is essential to ensure gender parity at all levels of society. Gender parity is of particular importance when issues of gender equality are discussed or measures for equality of opportunities are decided on. As long as gender relations are mostly left to women's organizations, and debated at

meetings with a majority of female participants, the deep structure of the mentalities remain unchanged (ibid.: 21).

#### **1.4: Theoretical Perspectives of Feminism**

According to Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2000), feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophy concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. In its narrowest interpretation, it refers to the effect to ensure legal and political equality for women: in its broadest sense it comprises any theory which is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified<sup>20</sup>. The term ‘feminism’ originated from the French word “feminisme” coined by the Utopian Socialist Charles Fourier, and was first used in English in the 1890’s in association with the movement for equal political and legal rights for women<sup>21</sup>.

According to contemporary feminist Maggie Humm (1995) the history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first feminist trend was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century concerned with women’s right to vote; the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, which refers to the idea and action associated with women’s liberation movement, campaigning for legal and social rights for women; while the third extends from the 1990s to the present, referring to continuation of, and a reaction to the perceived failure of second-wave feminism (Humm, 1995: 251).

Alongside these trends, there are several theories on feminism. Feminist theory is an extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical fields. It encompasses work in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies, literary criticism, art history, psychoanalysis and philosophy. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of these social and political relations, much of feminist theory focuses on the promotion of women's rights and interests. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping,

objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy. The American literary critic and feminist Elaine Showalter (1998) describe the phased development of feminist theory. Of the first what she calls “feminist critique” the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena. The second, according to her is “gynocriticism”, in which the “woman is producer of textual meaning” including “the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career and literary history”. The last phase is what she calls “gender theory”, in which the “ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored”<sup>22</sup>. Toril Moi (2002) criticized this model, seeing it as an essentialist and deterministic model for female subjectivity that fails to account for the situation of women outside the West<sup>23</sup>.

Several feminist ideologies have developed over the years. They are the liberalist, the radicals, individualist, black feminism, socialist and Marxist, post-structuralist and postmodernist, post-colonial and third-world feminism:

i. The Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism, which focuses on women’s ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal feminism uses the personal interactions between men and women as the place from which to transform society. According to liberal feminists, like all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of society.

ii. Radical feminism considers the male controlled capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist, as the defining feature of women’s oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way. Separatist

feminism is a form of radical feminism that does not support heterosexual relationships. Its proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are irresolvable. Separatist feminists generally do not feel that men can make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Another strand of radical is Anarcha-feminism, also called anarchist feminism. It combines feminist ideas with anarchist beliefs. Anarcha-feminism views patriarchy as manifestation of hierarchy, believing that the struggle against patriarchy is an essential part of class struggle, and the anarchist struggle against the State.

iii. Feminist like McElroy (2002) defines “individual feminism” in opposition to political or gender feminism. It is closely linked to the classical liberal tradition, the idea of individuality and personal responsibility of both women and men. Individualist attempt to change legal system in order to eliminate class privileges, including gender privileges, and ensure that individual have an equal rights, an equal claims under law to their own persons and property. It opposes any government interferences because it might create coercive hierarchy.

iv. Black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including women, through racial bias. Black feminist argues that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker's (2005) Womanism. It emerged after the early feminist movements that were led specifically by white women who advocated social changes such as woman's suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and had generally ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women.

v. Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminists think unequal standing in both the workplace and the domestic sphere holds women down. Socialist feminists see women are exploited by a patriarchal system that devalues women and the substantial work they do. Socialist feminists focus their energies on broad change that affects society as a whole, rather than on an individual basis. They see the oppression of women as a part of a larger pattern that affects everyone involved in the capitalist system. Marx felt when class oppression overcomes; gender oppression would vanish as well. A classic Marxist writings of Frederick Engels (2004) *The origin of Family, Private Property and the State* and August Bebel (2004) *Women under Socialism* as a powerful explanation of the link between gender oppression and class exploitation.

vi. According to post-structural feminists, differences is one of the most powerful tools that female possess in their struggle with patriarchal domination, and that to equate the feminist movement only with equality is to deny women a plethora of options because equality, is still defined from the masculine or patriarchal perspective. The Postmodern feminism, which is an approach to feminist theory that incorporates postmodern and post-structuralist theory. The largest departure from other branches of feminism is the argument that gender is constructed through language. The most notable proponent of this argument is Judith Butler. In her book, *Gender Trouble* (1999), she criticizes the distinction drawn by previous feminist sex and socially constructed gender. Her argument leads to the conclusion that there is no single cause for women's subordination and no single approach towards dealing with the issue.

vii. Postcolonial feminists, which emerged from the gendered history of colonialism, argue that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminists object to portrayals of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as

modern, educated and empowered. Postcolonial feminism is critical of Western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and liberal feminism and their universalization of female experience. Third-world feminism has been described as a group of feminist theories developed by feminists who acquired their views and took part in feminist politics in so-called third-world countries<sup>24</sup>.

### **1.5: Feminist theology and Philosophy**

Feminist theology is a movement that reconsiders the traditions, practices, scriptures, and theologies of religions from a feminist perspective. Some of the goals of feminist theology include increasing the role of women among the clergy and religious authorities, reinterpreting male-dominated imagery and language about God, determining women's place in relation to career and motherhood, and studying images of women in the religion's sacred texts<sup>25</sup>. Christian feminism is a branch of feminist theology which seeks to interpret and understand Christianity in light of the equality of women and men. Because this equality has been historically ignored, Christian feminists believe their contributions are necessary for a complete understanding of Christianity. While there is no standard set of beliefs among Christian feminists, most agree that God does not discriminate on the basis of biologically-determined characteristics such as sex. Their major issues are the ordination of women, male dominance in Christian marriage, and claims of moral deficiency and inferiority of abilities of women compared to men. They also are concerned with the balance of parenting between mothers and fathers and the overall treatment of women in the church. Islamic feminism is concerned with the role of women in Islam and aims for the full equality of all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate women's rights, gender equality, and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Although rooted in Islam, the movement's pioneers have also utilized secular and Western feminist discourses and recognize the role of Islamic feminism as part of an integrated global feminist movement. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Quran and encourage a questioning of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic

teaching through the Quran, *hadith* (sayings of Muhammad), and *sharia* (law) towards the creation of a more equal and just society. Jewish feminism is a movement that seeks to improve the religious, legal, and social status of women within Judaism and to open up new opportunities for religious experience and leadership for Jewish women. Feminist movements, with varying approaches and successes, have opened up within all major branches of Judaism. In its modern form, the movement can be traced to the early 1970s in the United States. According to Judith Plaskow (2003), who has focused on feminism in Reform Judaism, the main issues for early Jewish feminists in these movements were the exclusion from the all-male prayer group or *minyan*, the exemption from positive time-bound *mitzvot*, and women's inability to function as witnesses and to initiate divorce<sup>26</sup>.

Talking of the Christian feminist theology, the starting point of feminist theology is women's experience, and the rejection of 'patriarchy'. Women, it is argued, will only become truly human, with the ending of patriarchy. In looking back over Church history, many feminists challenge the sexism of, for example, the early church fathers and reformers, and they seek to recover the 'hidden history' of women. Surveying the field of academic theology, many would argue that it is and has been a 'male-defined' project. Theology means study of God; the word 'theo' masculine in form. Some feminists today prefer to speak of study of 'thea' - feminine form - hence 'thealogy'. There is a huge range of differences among feminist theologians ranging from the most conservative to the most radical. Some see themselves as within the orthodox Christian tradition. They regard themselves as continuing a prophetic tradition of calling believers back to authentic religion (in this case a renunciation of sexism). Others view the Christian tradition as so hopelessly compromised that the only solution is an exodus out of patriarchal religion to the older 'goddess' tradition of pre-Jewish/Christian paganism<sup>27</sup>.

There is also debate about whether or not women should be allowed a significant role in the Church. The group which supports the equality of role in the church between men and women suggests that as long as a person can lead a church,

it matters less what gender they are and in Jesus times, society was very different from present time. On the other hand, there is a radical group which strongly stands to the view that Jesus chose men, to carry on the faith as apostles and thus when a priest is at the altar he is representing Jesus, a man. There are Secular feminists who are humanists who disallow God, revelation, and religion in the discussion of feminism. They view the Bible as a major source of chauvinist ideas and a relic of antiquity that has no relevance to the ongoing debate over the roles of men and women in modern society. New Age feminists are pagans who are typically involved in the worship of a feminine deity or goddess. On the other hand, Liberal Christian feminists operate within a Christian framework but approach feminism (and theology in general) from a very liberal perspective. They believe the Bible writers were simply men of their times and were limited in their perspectives. Liberal Christian feminists employ a “hermeneutic of suspicion” - that is, they “systematically assume that the Bible's male authors and interpreters deliberately covered up the role of women in early Christianity”. Using such a hermeneutic, it is easy to sift out from the Bible anything one finds offensive to one's feminist tastes. Whereas Evangelical feminists are those who generally (not always) hold to conservative views on the Bible and theology but who nevertheless embrace the feminist ideal of abolishing gender-based roles in society, Church and home. They believe that Bible is authoritative, and rightly understood, supports their feminist views<sup>28</sup>.

The feminist study of gender and religion began in the 1960s and '70s, when some scholars and feminist like Mary Daly began to feel increasingly dissatisfied with the position of women in religion. There were two main aspects of traditional religious institution that were problems for feminist in Christianity:

- i. Christianity was typically androcentric. The texts, the leaders, experiences and rituals were focused on men, and women were seen as the deviant from the cultural normality.
- ii. It was patriarchal. All of the leaders were men and assumed to be strong and assertive, whereas women were seen as subservient, passive, weak and thus unfit to be

in a high position within religion. Women are morally inferior to men and a source of temptations. In tradition where God is considered male, there is sometimes the view that men are more like God than women. In I Corinthians 1:7, Paul asserts that man is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of the man.

According to the Religious liberals, consecration of female bishops would drastically reduce the level of sexism within the church. They feel that discrimination against women is immoral and is an embarrassment within the larger culture that has generally eliminate the privilege treatment towards men. They base their viewpoint on:

- i. Jesus' treatment of women as equals
- ii. Paul's statement about sexual equality in Galatians 3:28
- iii. They also note that of the 40 names that Paul mentions in his letters, 16 were women.

While on the other hand, the Conservatives within the Church of Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics deny consecration of women to priesthood, they view men and women as being equal but complementary. They feel that the two sexes should be confined to specific roles within the family, in the church, regardless of an individual woman's talent, ability and interests. Positions of power are to be given primarily or exclusively to males. The conservatives deny female ordination as priest, because that assigns them a role where they are considered equal to men in authority. Their opposition to the consecration of female bishops is even greater, because it would place some women in a supervisory role over some male priest. They base their opposition on specific passage in new testaments in the bible:

- i. I Timothy 2:11-15, did not permit a women to teach or to have authority over a man. She must be silent.
- ii. I Timothy 3:2 specifies that overseers and deacons must be men

iii. I Corinthians 14:34-35 states that women must be silent and in submissive when in church<sup>29</sup>.

With the change of time, the question of whether women should be given the power of authority or the bigger role in the church is becoming an issue in all the churches everywhere and Churches in Naga society is no exception. Naga women began participating in diverse modern activities. While the contribution of Christianity to the creation of new opportunity for women on one hand, and the restriction placed upon their exercise of ministry in the church on the other are well known, no systematic study of the problem has yet been made. The aim of this study is to stimulate the interest in further investigation and at the same time contribute towards the removal of inequality between men and women in leadership roles in the church.

#### **1.6: Area of Study**

The study attempts to understand the religious perceptions of Naga women with particular emphasis on the Angami, Ao, Konyak, Lotha and Sema covering the districts of Kohima, Mokokchung, Mon, Wokha and Zunheboto. The present research randomly selects few villages from the five outlined districts including the district headquarters to conduct the study:

i: Kohima: Kohima town (District headquarter); Kohima village; Konoma village; Nerhema village; Tseminyu town and village; and ToupHEMA village.

ii: Mokokchung: Mokokchung town (istrict Headquarter); Chuchiyimpang village, Impur compound; Longkum village; Longsa village; Mangmetong village; Mopongchuket village; Tuli; and Ungma village.

iii: Mon: Mon town (istrict Headquarter); Chui village; Longwa village; Mon village; Mopong headquarter; Nagimora; Phomching headquarter; Shangnyu village; Tizit village; Wanching village.

iv: Wokha: Wokha town (District headquarter); Baghty town, Chukitong village; Longsa village; and Wokha village.

v: Zunheboto: Zunheboto town (District headquarter); Aizuto mission compound; Akuluto village; Lumami village; Sataka village; Sumi Shetsu village; and V.K. town.

### **1.7: Objectives of the Study**

With the change of time, the question of whether women should be given the power of authority or the bigger role in the Church is becoming an issue in all the churches around the world and churches in Naga society is no exception. While the contribution of Christianity and modern education to the creation of new opportunity for women on one hand, and the restriction placed upon their exercise of ministry in the Church on the other are well known, no systematic study of the problem has yet emerged. It is the objectives of this work to investigate the role of women from traditional religious practices to the modern Church and to seek to establish whether Christianity has affected the traditional status of women. This work aims to bring parity of gender in the participation and leadership roles in the Church that exist and the stimulus that it would create for future investigations.

### **1.8: Methodology**

While trying to study and understand the role of women in religion, the present research has adopted several lists of methodologies. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The present research has primarily relied on personal interviews (both structured and unstructured) conducted with village elders, church leaders, women leaders of civil societies, women leader in the church, and other government officials. Oral tradition on Naga customary laws have also been relied to examine the role of women in the Naga society.

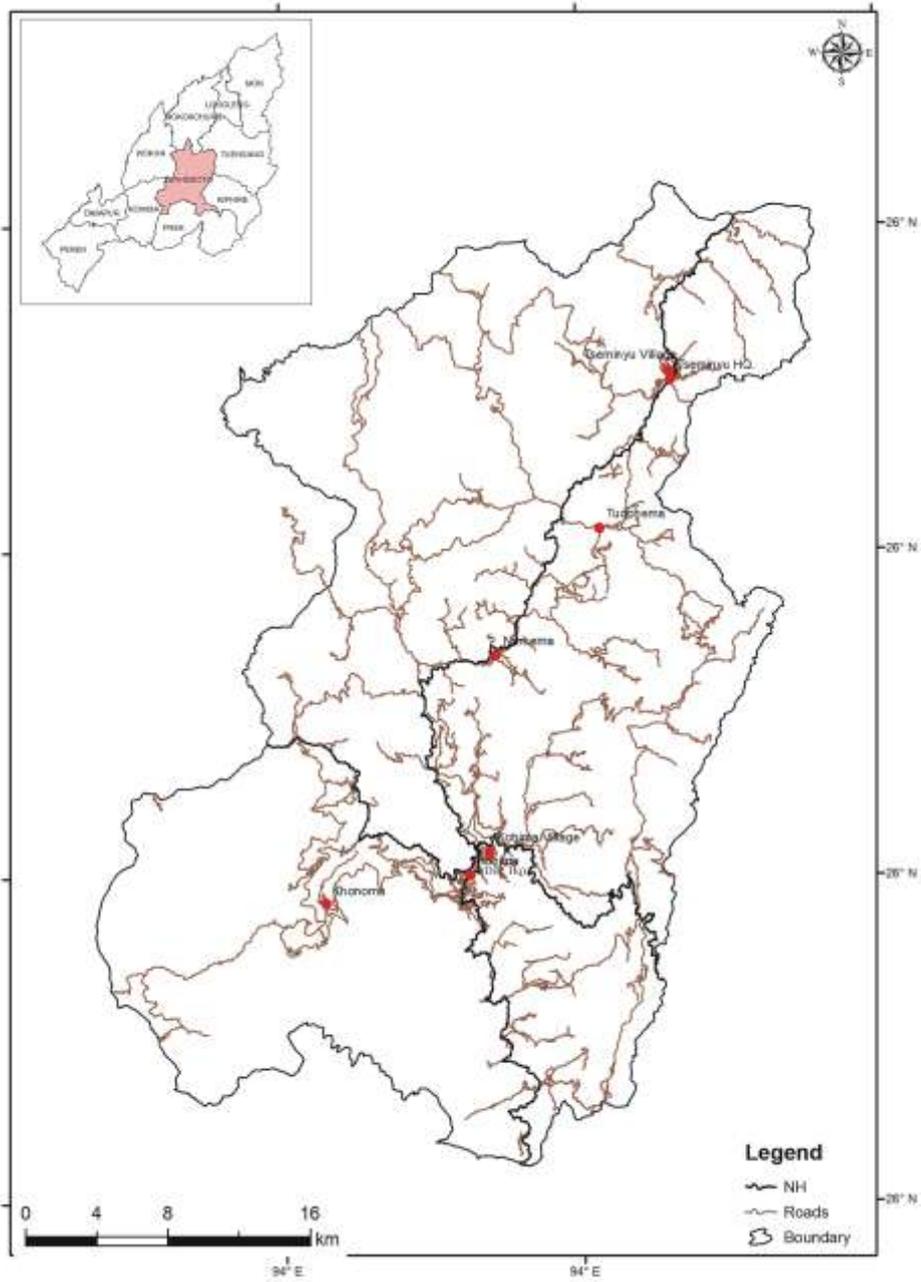
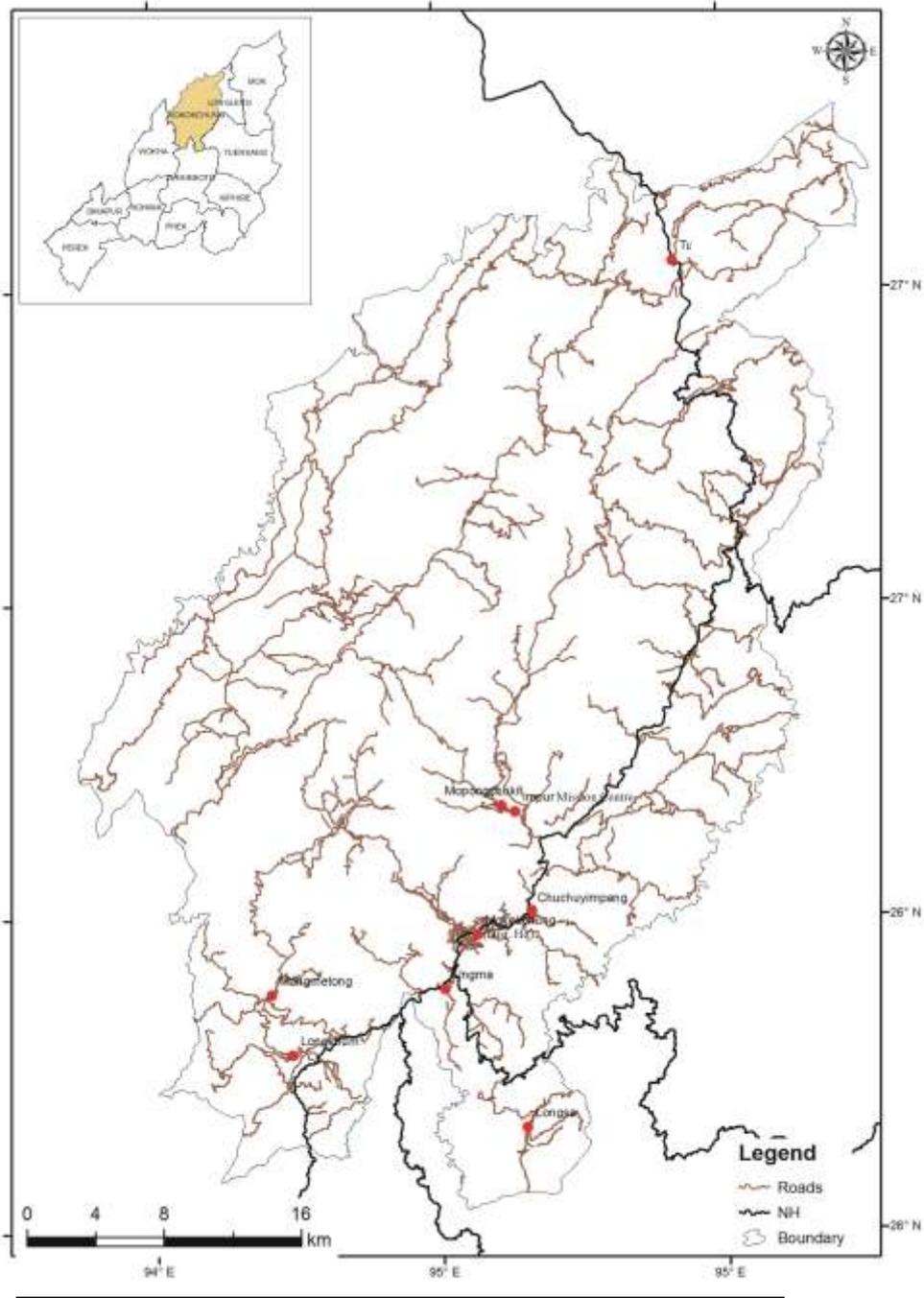


Figure. 2 Kohima District - indicating the area of study conducted



**Figure. 3 Mokochung District - indicating the area of study conducted**

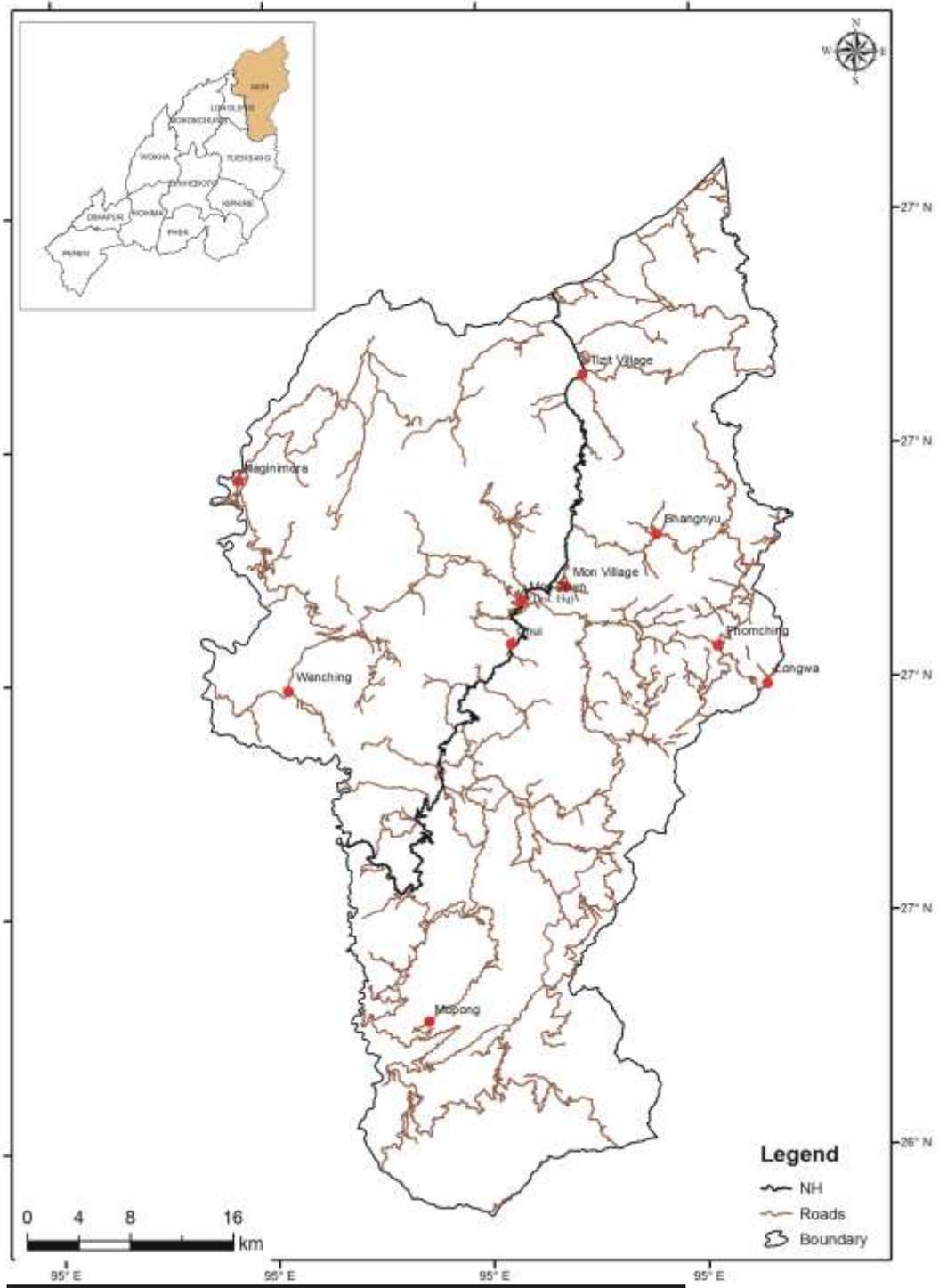


Figure. 4 Mon District - indicating the area of study conducted



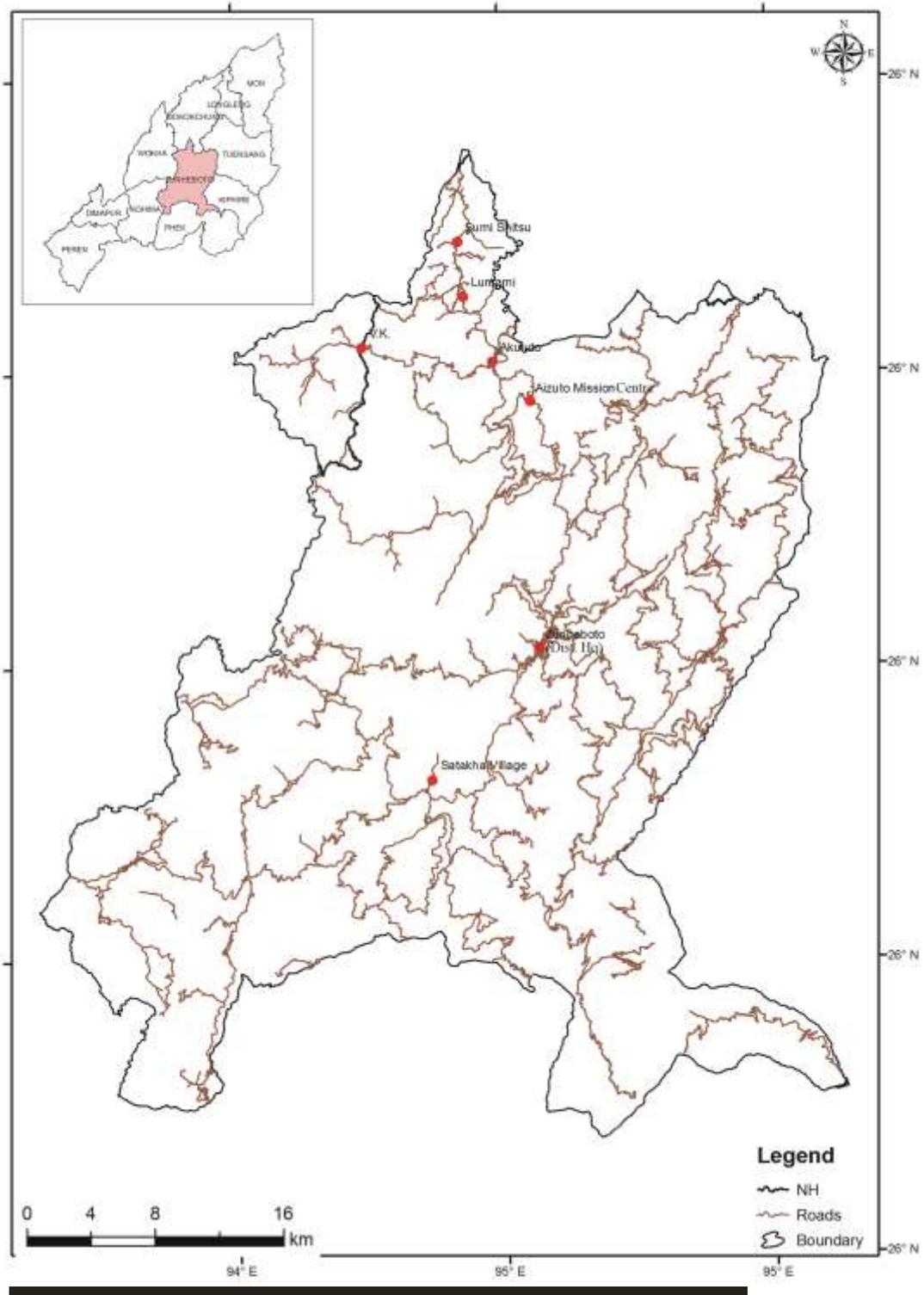


Figure. 6 Zunheboto District - indicating the area of study conducted

## End Notes

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND, HISTORY AND CULTURE OF NAGA SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW**

Nagaland, part of Assam and North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), became the 16<sup>th</sup> state of India on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1963. One of the smallest hill states of India, Nagaland is known for its myriad of tribes with their culture and traditions. The state of Nagaland is bordered by Assam in the west, Myanmar in the east, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam in the north and Manipur in the south (Nagaland State Human Development Report, 2004: 15). The geographical demarcation of the state lies between 25°60' and 27°40' north latitudes and between 93°20' and 95°15' east longitudes with an area of 16,575 square kilometers. It is a hilly ranges which break into a wide chaos of spurs and ridges. The altitude varies between 194 and 3048 m. Most of the villages stand at 1 to 2000 m high, as it is very typical of the Nagas to build their houses on the hill-top and at a higher elevation. The highest peak in the State, Saramati in Tuensang district is 3840 m high (Statistical Hand Book Of Nagaland, 2004: 2).

#### **2.1: Demography**

The total population of Nagaland, according to 2011, census is estimated to 1,978,502, with a male population of 1,024,649 and female population of 953,853. The average density of population is 119 per square kilometer (Statistical Handbook of Nagaland, 2013: 28; Table 2.2). The people of Nagaland are almost entirely tribal. There are many distinct tribes and sub-tribes having their own distinctive language and culture. The different tribes, which now constitute the Naga people, are rigidly distinct from one another. These tribes have their own, name which often give clue to their history (Sema, 1986 : 2).

## **2.2: Origin and Migration**

Naga stories of origin and migration are numerous but remains wanting in empirical data. Different scholars basing on the Naga art, material culture, language, tonal, etc., have theorized that the Nagas have historical and cultural connection with Indonesia and Malaysia. and belong to the Tibeto – Burman family. According to Sema, they are the first stage groups of migration from North-west China, and constitute a return group of migrations from the Polynesian Island etc. However, these theories are remotely inferential theories and in the absence of substantive evidence these theories remain inconclusive (Sema, 1989: 4). The origin of Nagas is a fixed question. Nagaland exhibits racial intermixture in a great way. It forms a meeting point in the Himalayas, Burmese, Japanese, Thais, Malaysian, Philippine, Polynesian and Indonesian cultures, its history preserves instances of assimilation and fusion among the varied tribes (Nagaland District Gazetteers, Kohima District, 1970: 19). Nuh (2002) has also pointed out that the Nagas belong to Mongoloid group. They have broad heads and a light complexion with black hair. It is believed that the earliest home of the Mongoloid people was on the upper reaches of the Hwang-ho river or Yellow river in China and further moving down to South East Asia through the mountain (Nuh, 2002: 2). Shimray (1985), identifies that by discerning into the legends, stories and folksongs, which were verbally passed on to the succeeding generation that the Nagas passing through the mainland and the Irawadi and Chindwin valley had gradually moved up and finally settled at Hsawngsup, now Thungdut in Burma, from where they finally moved on to the homeland they are occupying today. Thus, we can locate the Naga origin somewhere in South East Asia (Shimray, 1985: 13 & 16). Nagas also had no written script, because of which we have no authentic recorded history, yet history in the form of oral tradition was handed down from generation to generation, and the oral traditions of all the tribes unmistakably recalls the memory of certain places, common to all the tribes where they settled in the course of their migration. The oral traditions do not mention the place of their origin, or from which part of Asia they may have first started the journey of migration, though it is now generally accepted that they migrated from South East Asia, but the

names of certain places where they settled upon their entry into the North-East India are consistently found. And remarkably, almost every tribes includes these places in their traditions (Bendangangshi, 2008: 1).

Basing on the above information it can be certain that the Naga tribes have migrated to the present area through Burma. These Naga tribes might not have migrated at the same time. It is most likely that they entered their present habitat in waves following one another and in some cases in close succession. This view can be substantiated by the present location of tribes like the Konyaks, Phoms, Changs, Sangtams, Khiamungans and Yimchungers, specially that of the Konyaks and the Khiamungans. These tribes are still living in places in Burma which are adjacent to Nagaland. Other tribes like the Ao, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Angami and the Chakhesang came through South East Asia via East and the North of Manipur and then to Khezakenoma. Perhaps they may have lived here for years before they moved on and occupied their present location. It is believed that the Aos were the first to move and followed by the Lothas, Semas and after them came the Rengmas, the Angamis and the Chakhesang. Even the present locations of these tribes are in that order (Sema, 1986: 5). Alemchiba (1970) also maintains that a close study of the legends and traditions reveals that the area had been peopled by successive waves from different directions. On the whole there was a general movement of the people from South to North (Alemchiba, 1970: 19). Stacy ((1968) also concludes that whatever may be the truth in the legends and traditions, there is no clear evidence for their migrational movement. He is of the view that Nagas might have come from western China which was taken to be the mother of South East Asia. Thus all the weight of tradition points to migration from South (Stacy, 1968: 9).

Myths and legends narrate different stories about the origin of the Naga tribes. The Aos maintain that they originated from *Longtrok*. According to the legends and beliefs, Aos had emerged from *Longtrok*, meaning ‘six stones’ (long – stone and trok – six) at Chungliyimti, who became their ancestors, and do not trace their history beyond that (Jamir, 1997: 1). This myth is so central to the Ao world-view that in Ao

folklore, songs, narratives and all other customary practices are traced to *Longterok* and the ancestral village called Chungliyimti. At present Chungliyimti is one of the villages of Sangtem area of Tuensang District. Though the myth of origin from *Longterok* is most deeply entrenched in the folklore of the Ao, it is not confined to Ao tribe alone. The Northern Sangtams also associate Chungliyimti as their ancestral village and the story of Longterok occupies important place in the formation of the six major clan identities of Northern Sangtams. Other tribes like Chang and Phoms also have a tradition that links them to Longterok and Chungliyimti (Aier & Jamir, 2009: 5-6). Hutton (1921a) mentions that the myth of the magical stone of Khezakenoma tells about three brothers who one day quarreled over their rights to use the stone for basking paddy. They eventually separated and became the ancestors of Lotha, Angami, Sema and the Chakhesang tribes. The Angami origin myths place the descent of their clans to two brothers who came out of the Earth. The descendants of the elder are called Pepoma and the descendants of the younger are called pepfuma (as cited in Aier, 2009: 5-6). The Lotha clans consists of three segments- Tonphyaktsu-rui; Ezomontsu-rui and the Miphongshan-rui. All those clans under these three segments traces their origin to two ancestors- Limachan and Limathung who are believed to have come out of the earth (Aier, 2009: 6). The Semas migrated from Khezakenoma to Swemi and Cheswezumi villages in two directions and then to Hebolimi and Ighanumi. The Semas called Cheswezumi as Chisho and from Ighanumi and Hebolimi they moved to the place which constitute the present Sema area, Zunheboto (Sema, 1986: 6).

Stories of origin prevalent among the different Naga tribes are merely legends handed down from generations. These are a part of a myth and folklore of the Nagas and certainly cannot be taken as factual history nor treated as already established historical data unless they are subjected to a more critical scrutiny. (Sema, 1986: 7-8). The origin and other details of the early life of the Nagas is a mystery and obscured. The highest mystery is the origin of the various tribes of Nagaland (Stacy, 1968: 9). These tribes called the Nagas, even defy a common nomenclature. There are

many distinct tribes with almost every tribe constituting a separate language group. Their culture and social setup varies from tribe to tribe.

### **2.3: Socio-Cultural practices**

In the primitive society, the family, clan, phratry and totem is a unit of social organization (Sharma, 2010: 153). Likewise in Naga society, the basic importance of every Naga is in his family, the clan, the *Khel* and the Village. Naga social organization is made up of cross-cutting group ties. By being members of a larger functional units – family, lineages, clans, age groups, classes, *murongs* and villages, the individual and the household are in very few senses autonomous but are integrated into the society (Jacobs, 1990: 53).

Nagas as a tribe had never been under one head. A tribal spirit prevailed in each segment. But for the purposes of war and defense, leagues of villages were formed (Philip, 1983: 30). Mills (1926) while talking about the Aos, has said that the whole tribe has never been united under one head, and fought with each other, yet a tribal feelings does exist. Even in the old head-hunting days loosely knit leagues gave the tribe a certain amount of political cohesion. For all Nagas the real political unit of the tribe is the village (Mills, 1926: 176). Among the Aos the largest unit is the village and that is bonded together by social, political and religious ties. The village acts as a unit in all things. An individual is for the village and the village is for the individual. Among the Angamis the village may be regarded as a unit of the political and religious sides of Angami life, the real unit of the social side is the clan. The clan almost forms a village in itself, often fortified within the village inside in its boundaries. Even during wars, though the villages were united the jealousy and suspicion among the clans would inevitably be a source of weakness (Hutton, 1921a: 109). The Semas can only be said to have a tribal organization in so far as the villages which they inhabit are organized on a pattern generally prevalent throughout the tribe. The basis of Sema society is the village which is under the control of the chief. It is not to say that the clan is never important to Semas, clan feeling exist as does tribal feeling but it has no organs (Hutton, 1921b: 121). The Konyaks speak of the clan as a

pyramid of 'houses'. All the small houses (junior lineages) recognize descent from the great house (the senior lineage which represents the clan). Together all the clans houses are responsible for the debts, fines, obligations and proper behavior of their members. The individual is born into a lineage, clan, *murong*, class and village. The importance of any of these particular groupings varies from one Naga community to another. Diverse types of groups exist but still Nagas are of one society, an aggregate of community who share a set of structure or principles in common, but emphasize them differently (Jacobs, 1990: 56 & 64).

Naga society is a patriarchal society in which the father is the head of the family and all the decisions are made by him, but when necessary wife is consulted. Children are expected to help with basic household and agricultural task. Between the age of 6 and 12, in communities where the *morung* is an important institution, the children will stop sleeping in their parents' house and will start to sleep in the *morung*, learning the skills of responsibilities of adults (ibid.: 56). *Morung* is a dormitory for unmarried men. Nagas built the village dormitory or bachelor's hall like that of the aboriginal tribes of Chota Nagpur and Madhya Pradesh in India and of the tribes of Melanesia and Polynesia (Mujamdar, 1958: 259). The *morung* was one of the most important social institutions of Naga life. Most of the Naga tribes, except a few like Angamis and Semas have this institution. Angamis use such houses on ceremonial occasions and observance of days of prohibition. For the Semas, the village chief's house served both as a *morung* and a place for ceremonies (Philip, 1983: 31). With the coming of Christianity and western education the importance of this institution considerably reduced.

In Naga society, individuals are not compelled to marry, and marriage should be thought as a relationship between the main units of society, rather than as a relationship between individuals. The husband and wife unit forms the basis of economic activity. Marriage was also vital for the social advancement of the individual male, for most of the ceremonial feasts that confer status depend on a man having a wife (Jacobs, 1990: 61). Divorce was not uncommon among the Nagas. It

was a frequent occurrence among the Angamis for various reasons, such as infidelity on the part of woman, incompatibility of temper and failure to bear children (Davis, 1969: 307). Polygamy was not (and is not) practiced by Aos, but divorces and remarriages were a frequent occurrences. The reasons for divorce were either adultery as well as barrenness, and it was by mutual consent or by appeal to the village authorities (Smith, 1925: 56). Polygamy was allowed among the Lothas, but was only practiced by the rich. Girls married by 13 to 14 years of age and owing to the system of early marriage, divorce for infidelity was very common (Davis, 1969: 351).

At death, bodies are treated in diverse ways. The Angamis bury their corpses as well as the Lothas. The Konyaks practiced platform exposure of the corpse, removing the head first which is placed in a pot. It is then fed over the subsequent years, particularly at times of agricultural festivals. After the next harvest the skull, which is painted with a geometrical design is turned to face outwards. This was because there were often some rituals which links the death with the harvest (Jacobs, 1990: 61-64). The Semas also bury their dead. Graves, as a rule, were just dug outside the dead man's house which were not more than three feet deep. In some villages a small thatched roof was put up over the graves (Davis, 1969: 374). The Aos do not bury their dead. The corpse is placed in a structure of bamboo and thatch, somewhat like a house, just big enough to fit the body and then put up to be smoked in the outer compartment of the house ten days to two months. After which the dead man's cloths which was laid over the structure was taken out and placed it on a bamboo platform in the village cemetery (Davis, 1969: 328).

Slavery was prevalent among the Aos. According to what Davis (1891) has observed during his tour in Ao area as regard to slavery was that slaves were well treated, considered almost as family members, but cases of harsh treatment must have occurred occasionally. If ill-treated all they had to do was run away but the inhabitants of any village in which they took refuge would return them to the master. Children were sold into slavery for debts. In one case a woman of eighteen years old who was deserted by her husband was enslaved as her father had outstanding debts.

Female slave were not allowed to be married or to have children (cited in Elwin, 1969: 326; also see Smith, 1925: 54).

The Nagas are primarily dependent on agriculture. Festivals and religious ceremonies were arranged around the agricultural cycle of the year. Each agricultural stage was preceded and followed by rituals and ceremonies performed either by individual household or by the community. Among the ceremonies that have been hosted by an individual, the most important was the Feast of Merit. During the feast of merit the whole community participates but it was the host who bears all the expenses of providing food and drinks to whole village, an opportunity is given to the community to partake in the feasting hosted by the donor. In return it increased the social status and influence of the host in the society. In the Public ceremonies and festivals the most important are the sowing and harvesting ceremonies and the accompanying festive celebration (Aier, 2004: 51-52).

The tribal religion varies as much as tribal customs or tribal laws do and to quote Mills (1926) 'Naga religion is not a moral code. It is a system of ceremonies' (Mills, 1926: 215). This is substantiated by Philip (1983) that Nagas worship supernatural, they fear supernatural powers. However, Naga religion appears very simple and has no deep rooted philosophy in it. Its faith and practices do not demand a spiritual or mystical union with higher power (Philip, 1983: 37).

#### **2.4: Village Administrative System**

The Naga traditional village administrative system varies from tribe to tribe. According to Philip (1976), the polity of Naga society varies from near dictatorship to an extreme democracy. Philip's view of near dictatorship is supported by Julian Jacobs (1990) that some Naga communities are organized very strongly around the principal of the village as a unit, ruled over by an autocratic chief. The Konyak chieftains are very powerful which is hereditary. The chief, or the Great *Angs* were not only political leader or administrative head but were also sacred. The priestly functions of the Konyak *Angs* is more prominent than any other tribe. They were

dominant in secular and ritual senses (Jacobs, 1990: 69; also see Philip, 1976: 30). In regard to some Konyak villages, the case is different. The Kongan village of the Konyaks insist that they did not originally have Angs but their acquisition of two Ang clans from Wakching village, adopted an aristocratic ideology (Jacobs, 1990 :70-72). The Semas too have powerful secular chiefs, distinguished in their appearances by ornaments (ibid.: 72). A.W.Davis (1891) in his account on the Sema Nagas, wrote that the point of distinction of Semas chiefs from the other Naga tribes is the position of hereditary chiefs. These chiefs have many privileges and are in a far superior position to that of an ordinary Naga headman (cited in Elwin, 1969: 372-373). The Chief is regarded as the most important element in polity of the village but there is *chochomi* (elders of the village) whose functions in the village administration cannot be ignored because it is they who assisted the chiefs. The chiefs seek the help of these elders in managing public affairs and also act as a deputy to manage affairs of his own when the chief is away. It is to the interest of the chief to keep the village contented, and as there are different clans in the village, the chief summon the most prominent member of each clan to take part in any matter which affects the whole community (Hutton, 1921b: 151-152).

On the other hand, John Butler (1847) talking about Naga Customs in ‘A Sketch of Assam, pointed out that the form of Naga government is democratic (cited in Elwin, 1969: 524). It has been held that the Angamis are the most egalitarian of all the Nagas. Butler (1855) wrote, ‘Their government is decidedly democratic; for, although each village community has a nominal head or chief, it is evident their chiefs have no absolute power over the people’ (cited in Jacobs, 1990: 72). Commenting on Angami Democracy, John Butler (1875) that Angamis have no regular settled form of government. For them might is right, and every man follows the dictates of his own will, a form of the purest democracy which existed among the Angamis. There are number of headmen or chiefs in every village called *Peumas* who managed the arbitrations. The authorities of the Peumas are nominal because their orders are obeyed only if it happened as according to the wishes of the community at large (cited in Elwin, 1969: 525-526). Another democratic tribe was the Aos. The Ao villages are

very democratic and one man is as good as any other (Smith, 1925: 52). The Ao villages was a miniature state having a republican form of government with a well-established *Putu Menden* (Putu refers to generation and menden means seat). The representatives of various clans form this government. *Putu menden* is the highest authority, that originated at Chungliyimti. The members are called *Tatar* (the Chosen leader) who exercise their supreme power collectively in their village administration (Jamir & Lanunungsang, 2005: 39-39). Among the Lothas, a more egalitarian government by clan and murong elders is found (Jacobs, 1990: 72). A.W. Davis (1891) in Census of India (1891), has put a remarks that the Lothas are exceedingly democratic in their village customs. Headmen have little or no power, and every man does as it seems best to him (cited in Elwin, 1969: 352).

In the present society, the Naga villages are headed by the Village Chairman who is the head of the village council, the apex body of administration in the village. The village council control all the affairs of the village and the different organization existing in the villages are under the control of the village council, though they functions independently. Among the Konyaks the institution of Great *Ang* still survive, but his authoritarian power is not like of the past, though he interfere in the affairs of the village council when needed but refrains from interfering in religious matters.

## **2.5: Customary Laws (Law and Justice)**

Anthropologist has defined law as concerning with rules of conduct and the way it operate to secure respects for these rules. Pospisal (1971) thus define “law is conceived as rules or modes of conduct made obligatory by some sanctions which is imposed or enforced for their isolation by a controlling authority from man’s feelings or sense of right”. Vinogradoff (1974) defines it as “a set of rules imposed or enforced by society with regard to the attribution and exercise of power over things” (as cited in Vitso, 2003: 1-2). Law contributes towards social order in human life by dealing disputes before it leads to continuing social disorder. Thus law can be seen as a means of social control which is found in existence in both the simple and complex society,

and customs is the major source of law and it regulates human behavior in early society when written source of laws were not in existence. The origin of custom lies when a particular habits is adopted by a group of people, it becomes a custom of that community. Custom is not law and is not imposed by state but when customs are recognized and accepted then they attain the status of law (ibid.: 2).

Like any other society in the world, the Nagas have their traditional religious practices, social codes and legal institutions based on myths and legends which are transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition like narratives, folk tales, folklores and folk songs. The existence of tribal customary law is as old as the tribe itself, and thus tribal customary law can be a part of the study of tribal society (ibid: 5). Many British ethnographer and administrators such as Mills on *The Lothas* (1922), *The Aos* (1926), and *The Rengmas* (1937); Hutton on *The Angami Nagas* (1921), and *The Sema Nagas* (1921); and Elwin *The Nagas in the Nineteen Century* (1969) in which he published the reports of some British administrator which they recorded through personal observation and first-hand accounts; have discussed on the Naga traditional cultural life of the people and described the importance and influence of their customary law on the life of the people. Through their writings it can be seen that traditional customs and laws were important in regulating the life of the people. There are no written records on how this law has been practiced but this has been handed down from generation to generation orally which serves as the general sanction for the observance of traditional norms.

In Naga society, the highest authority is customary law. Every individual is bind by this law. It is the custom that designs the behavior of an individual in the society and anyone forbade the law is punished as according to the law. Naga society is a patriarchal society, and as according to the customary law descent and inheritance are generally in the male line. The law of inheritance is almost same among all the Nagas. The property of the father is divided equally among the sons (in case of more than one son) during the father's life time. When a son marries he receives his portion of inheritance from the father. The youngest son usually inherits the parental house.

According to the Angami tradition as stated by Hutton (1921a), the property of any son dying without male children during his father's lifetime reverts the property to his father, later (after the father's death) it goes to the youngest son, who either keep it or share with his other brothers (Hutton, 1921a: 136). The wealth of the domestic unit is affected by the customary law of inheritance in each tribe. Generally in practice each brother receives a similar amount in property from the father, but the Angamis leave most of the property to the youngest son, while the some group of Konyaks prefer to leave all the property to the eldest (Jacobs, 1990: 61). Property other than land is not subject to customary restriction except in so far as weapons and ornaments by men always go to male heirs, Movable property can be inherited by sons and daughters, and no fixed rules (ibid: 61; also see Huttons, 1921a: 141-143). The Naga males inherit all property, and they also inherit the father's debts as well (Hutton 1921b: 160).

As regard to the ownership of land in the village, there are land that are privately owned and also land commonly owned by the village. Cultivated lands are privately owned and uncultivated lands are owned by the village. Murong land is held for the maintenance of the murong but this varies from tribe to tribe. For the Rengmas there is no *morung* land, but land is owned by the clans or the *khels*. Most of the land in Sema area is privately owned (Philip, 1976: 36). For the Semas whether the land is family land, clan land or village land, cannot be sold by an individual. The land must first be divided among the owners and the one who wished to part with his share can be specified, then only he is at the liberty to dispose or to do what it seems good to him. The sale of land to the person of another village is strongly opposed and this is recognized in practice by an order forbidding any sale of land from one village to another village. Common land holdings by the whole community existed in one or two of the most eastern Semas villages, but has ceased to exist. All land is now privately owned (Hutton, 1921b: 155-156). The Aos for instance live in a large permanent villages and private property is recognized in a well defined laws and customs. Most of this private land is under cultivation. The system of their cultivation was *jhum*, which demands that after the land is cultivated the land to be abandoned for eight to

ten years and cultivate again. During this period of eight to ten years no one may cut wood or bamboo on the land of others. Trespassers were seriously dealt and punished (Smith, 1925: 58-59). Among the Angamis terraced fields, wood plantation, gardens, building sits and greater part of cultivated land is individual property and can be sold or disposed at the interest of the owner. There is a certain amount of *jhum* land which is the common property of a clan or of the village. The cultivation of this kind of land is settled either by a system of general consent or by a system of grab under which the one who wishes to cultivate goes and set a mark on the land of his choice, but again leave an opportunity to the other member to obtain a similar amount. This kind of property can be sold only by the clan, but at times it might be possible for a man to sell his share in the common rights if the clan consent to it (Hutton, 1921a: 140-141).

It is common in all the Naga villages that disputes within the village are settled by the elders of the village. The guilty pay their fines in terms of pigs or cows. But Semas according to Hutton (1921b) disputes apart from being settled by chief and the village elders, the Semas being usually ready to agree to any reasonable compromise, at times if it is a dispute to a private right the matter would probably settled by a compromise (Hutton, 1921b: 163). Disputes with other villages are settled by meeting of the elders from the respective villages. At times disputes are settled by oaths. In deciding disputes decision is referred to the elders of the village and as a custom it is regarded as final but sometimes the custom are defied the the question of fact are usually decided by oath. The accused family member or the relatives of the Angamis usually are not willing to accept the oath unless they are satisfied that the statement is true, as false oath would entail death or at least misfortune (Hutton, 1921a: 144). The oath is less resort among the Semas than by many other Naga tribes, because when an oath is suggested, neither the party will abide by the oath of the other. Thus, at any rate the Semas will not take oath recklessly or indiscriminately (Hutton, 1921b: 164).

The Nagas follow a very strict tradition and customs when it comes to marriage and divorce. Marriage between the same clan is prohibited. Marriages, among the Nagas were mostly exogamous. Customs ordained what could intermarry. A boy and

a girl of a same clan are brother and sister and are not allowed to marry. According to Hutton (1921b), a Sema man would be guilty of incest and banished from the village, if he marries a woman who is his third cousin in patrilineal descent but can marry any female relation of his own mother on her father's side (Hutton, 1921b: 131-132). Young women marry between the age of 15 to 20 and young men between the age of 20 to 25. Bride - price was not uncommon among the Nagas. It is customary among some Naga tribes, the man pays a bride-price and in return he receives gifts, this gift exchange between the two groups continues. Marriage payments involve exchange of material and ceremonial value. The Semas pay the pride price and at times the parents of the girl will try to secure the highest possible bride-price, and will insist on marrying their daughter within the chiefly clans. Among the Rengmas the groom's family present a spearhead to the bride's family as a symbol of tribute between the families (a gift of a spear is a universal Naga symbol of tribute between groups). In case of Lotha bride-price, there are eleven exchanges, each meaning something quite different (Jacobs, 1990: 57-61). Davis (1891) in his report on the Lothas, stated that custom allowed polygamy but was practiced only by the rich. Girls were, as a rule, married off at a young, by 13 or 14 years of age and the pride price were usually about Rs.100. Owing to early marriage divorce were also very common and widows were allowed to remarry (cited in Elwin, 1969: 351). Davis (1891), the *khels* among the Angamis are exogamous subdivision and so a man is obliged to look for his wife of a *khel* different from his own. For the Angamis on the day of the marriage, the father of the groom sends some pigs (numbers varies as according to the wealth), salt and some liquor (rice beer) to the bride's parents, by which a feast is given to the bride's friends and the *khel* men (ibid.: 305-306). Davis report shows, though he did not use the word 'bride price', sending materials for the feast clearly shows that the groom's family gave something to the bride's family. Like other Naga tribes the Aos are very strict about enforcing the rules of exogamous marriages. Polygamy is not practiced by the Aos, as well as the Angamis. Marriages among the Aos were taken place without any ceremony, but there was a custom at times which may be called, the parents of the bride had to give rice to the new home, failure to make such provision

was a disgrace. The bride also takes some quantity of firewood to the new house for cooking the first meal (Smith, 1925: 55).

Divorce was very frequent among the Nagas. When divorce happens it was the law and custom that gave the verdict after studying the matter. For instance according to the customary law if a woman among the Angamis is divorced for her infidelity, all her cloths, beads and other belongings were taken by the husband and her family had to repay the expenses made by the husband's family during marriage. If divorced for other reason, and some fault of her own, then she receives one-third of the grains that is there in the house that time. If a woman leaves her husband for no fault on his part, then she had to repay all the expenses of the marriage (Davis, 1969: 307). Likewise if an Ao woman desert her husband then the husband should report to her parents and if she does not return within a reasonable period of time, he may marry again. But if the woman marries, her first husband may report to the village authority, and if she found guilty then her new husband was compelled to pay a fine of a number of pigs. The same verdict was face by men who were unfaithful. (Smith, 1925: 56). Widows and Widowers were allowed to remarry, but for that certain rules to follow. In case of Aos they were allowed to remarry only after a lapse of one year, if married sooner they were made to pay fine. But some three years must lapsed to remarry, if the husband faced an unnatural death or the wife has died in childbirth (ibid.: 56). There was no place in the society for those who commit the crime of adultery and seduction as they were treated with utmost severity.

It is clear from the above discussion that though there is obscurity and mystery that surrounds the origin and migration of the Nagas to their present land they have a very strong social set-up and rich culture. There are many distinct tribes, each speaking different languages and their culture and social setup varies from tribe to tribe. Despite of these differences they defy a common nomenclature. The village administration is the highest authority for each and every Naga village. The social cohesion and stability achieved by the Naga villages-communities have been preserving their traditional values till today. Considering the importance of their

traditional institutions and customary practices, the Constitution of India has made special provision by enacting article 371(A) for the Nagas to preserve their traditional customary practices.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **STATUS OF WOMEN IN NAGA SOCIETY**

The status of a person in the society is determined by the position of an individual in the social system, rights and obligations in terms of power and authority. According to Ralph Linton (1971), “the term status, like the term culture, has come to be used with a double significance. A status, in the abstract, is a position in a particular pattern...A status, as a distinct from the individual who may occupy it, is simply a collection of rights and duties” (cited in Sharma, 2010: 89). Hobbs and Stuart (1978) also defined status as “a defined position in the social structure that is distinguished from and at the same time related to other position. Each status is linked to a social role, that is, a pattern of behaviour expected of one who occupies a status” (cited in Sharma, 2010: 89).

Talking of the status of women in society, it refers to a position of women as an individual in the social structure defined by her designated rights and obligations (Mao, 1998: 11). Scupin and Decorse (2009) has divided the society into five different societies as Band societies, Tribes, Chiefdoms, Agricultural states and Industrial states in which they have discussed about the status and role played by women in each society. In Band societies whose subsistence activity is depended on hunting and gathering, gender relations tend to be more egalitarian. Male and female have more or less equal status because of the substantial contribution made by women in gathering food. As a result of their important role in economic activities women participate equally with men in political decision making. But equality between male and female in foraging societies are not universal. In society like Eskimo, the society is more male dominated as the female do not contribute much in the hunting which is the only subsistence activity and thus females have a lower status. However, foragers tend to have much equality than most other society (Scupin and Decorse, 2009: 388-389). Like the foragers, the status of women in tribal society also depends on their

contribution to subsistence activities. Their main economic activity is horticulture and women actually contribute more to cultivation. While the males clear grounds, the women weed and harvest the crops. In tribal society, matrilineal society also exists in which women have considerable influence in economic and political decision making. However male holds the influential positions of political power and maintain control over economic resources (ibid.: 416). In contrast to the Band societies and tribal, in Chiefdoms societies the male exercise economic and political dominance over females. Among the highest status descent groups, men claim rights to the labour of children and women. A status of women depends upon her parents and siblings (ibid.: 444). On the other hand, agricultural states were even more patriarchal than tribes or chiefdoms. Women were confined to cooking, raising children and caring of domestic animals. Martin and Voorhies (1975) emphasizes that a definite distinction arose in agricultural states between men and women roles in society. Women were confined to domestic activities while men were allowed to participate in public affairs. Women were not allowed to own property, engage in politics, pursue education or participate in any activities outside the domestic sphere (cited in Scupin and Decorse, 2009: 461-462). The status of women in industrial states proved better than the other four societies. Industrialization has undermined the traditional form of patriarchy. The male authority and control over female diminished as women gained more independence. With the change of role in economic, women attempted to gain economic and political rights. However women are still restricted in the workplace and have a dual burden of both the outside and domestic. This indicates that the traditional legacy of patriarchy still exist in most industrial society (ibid.: 489-490). Thus women plays certain roles in all the society but are dominated by men.

When we look at the Origin of Civilizations, most agricultural civilizations downgraded the status and potential of Women identity, at least according to modern Western standards and to the implicit standards of hunting-and-gathering societies. Agricultural civilizations were characteristically patriarchal; that is, they were run by men and based on the assumption that men directed political, economic, and cultural life. Furthermore, as agricultural civilizations developed over time and became more

prosperous and more elaborately organized, the status of women deteriorated from its initial level. Individual families were normally set up on a patriarchal basis, with the husband and father determining the fundamental conditions and making the key decisions. Patriarchal family structure rested on men's control of most or all property, starting with land itself; marriage was based on property relationships and it was assumed that marriage, and therefore subordination to men, was the normal condition for the vast majority of women. A revealing symptom of patriarchal families was the fact that, after marrying, a woman usually moved to the orbit (and often the residence) of her husband's family.

Women are mentioned in Hindu *Shastras* as bond of slave of her father when she is young, to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is a mother. Many efforts have been made to bring dignity to women by social reformers but in the absence of any legal sanction or authority, the efforts could not sustain. To break down the barriers in the ways for advancement of women, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar has laid down the foundation of concrete and sincere efforts by codifying the common Civil Code for the Hindus, which could be extended to other sections of Indian society as well. This was the real first step towards the recognition and empowerment of women in India (Tomer, 2006: 1-3). In contrast to this treatment of women as slave in Hindu society, women in traditional Naga society is respected and honoured for her role in the family. She takes care of the children and all domestic affairs are looked after by her, like cook for the family, fetches water and firewood, and all other household chores. She assists her husband in the field (agriculture) throughout the seasons and also participates in singing and dancing during festivals. Fürer-Haimendorf states that, "Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of the people by social position and personal freedom of its women, you think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages" (cited in Thong and Kath, 2011: 99-100). J.P.Mills (1926) talking about the Ao Naga women remarks that, "an Ao woman is very far from being a slave and a drudge. Her position is no whit inferior to that of a man. She always has her clan behind her, and were a

bad-tempered husband to bully his wife he would soon have a swarm of angry in-laws buzzing around his ears. All her life a woman enjoys considerable freedom” (Mills, 1926: 211-212).

In Naga society, a woman is well protected. She is protected by her father when she is young and by her husband after marriage. She has her clan behind to support her even after marriage (in case of any uneven situation with her husband). A woman is a daughter, a sister, a wife and a mother. However, such privileges do not define her status. Naga society is a patriarchal society in which women are often regarded as inferior to men and are kept at par with children and minor. In every society women has been an important factor for development as men, yet her status are not equal in many aspects. In traditional Naga society, no doubt women were highly honoured and respected for the role that she played in the family. The women did not just take care of the children and all other domestic affairs but also contributed equally in economic subsistence by assisting her husband in agricultural work. Besides, no religious rituals or ceremonies could be performed without her participation for it was the wife who helped in preparing for all such rituals and ceremonies. Women participated during festivals by singing and dancing along with the men folk. But the roles played by women do not seem to get recognition many a times.

In social activities outside the family she is not assigned any prominent role to play which earns her recognition in the society. For instance, women in traditional Naga society were not allowed to be a member of the village administrative body. It was the highest authority that every decision of the village was taken by this body. Anungla Aier in her paper *Women in Ao society* (1998) points out that in every Ao villages, any citizen irrespective of wealth and rank has the right to participate in village administration. But only the male member performs the role of citizen because the village administrative body is constituted by chosen male representatives of different clans. Women could not be a member or participate in any policy making matter(Aier, 1998: 95). Among the Konyaks, women were not allowed to attend any

meeting of the village (Zehol & Zehol, 1998: 77). This same kind of restriction for women's participation in village administration and in any policy making is found in all the Naga tribes. The Naga society is patrilineal and thus descent and inheritance is through the father and male line. Among the Angamis, women are not entitled to inherit ancestral property. In case of absence of any male child the ancestral property would be given to the father's immediate male relatives. Properties bought by parents themselves can be given to female child and can be disposed it off at her own will (Kelhou, 1998: 55). As for the Aos, women have no rights of inheritance, either movable or immovable. If she receives immovable property as a gift from her father it goes back to her father's heirs after her death (Aier, 1998: 94).

According to Hutton (1921b), the position of women in Sema tribe is probably higher as far as the families of chiefs are concerned though there are more restriction of their possession of property and the freedom of young/unmarried women to freely mix around with young men of their age group like the Ao and Angami women (Hutton, 1921b: 183). Chishi also expresses that when comparative studies are done, the status of Sema women are comparatively higher. Mother plays a vital role in decision making in the family. Sema women are regarded as strong and warrior type that even during the head hunting raids women would accompany men. Depending on the social status the father of the bride can offer a plot of land as a gift. Among the Semas, even women were appointed G.B/Goan Bura<sup>1</sup>.

Nagas practiced head-hunting in the past, and among the Konyaks when a warrior returned home with head or several heads, he along with his wife would be tattooed as a mark of merit. This is evident that women also equally celebrated with their brave warriors at the time of their victory. Heads were taken as a trophies and the heads of a young unmarried girl was equally valued to that of a man (Zehol & Zehol, 1998: 79). Among the Aos, during the raid, the warrior who take the head of a woman were honoured more, because women were regarded as a symbol of fertility, for which utmost care and protection were always taken to prevent losing the village fertility (Aier, 1998: 95-96). During the time of conflicts, women usually stayed

confined and protected in the village and to go inside the village and hunt the head of a woman was a sign of bravery for the warrior. Thus the importance of a woman head was not because of her higher status but it only earned a warrior higher status in the society for his bravery. This culture of head-hunting has disappeared after the coming of Christianity.

In the classless, caste-less Naga society, women have traditionally enjoyed a high social position, with a pivotal role in both family and community affairs. However, being a patriarchal society with strong warrior tradition, it is considered an honour to be born as a man. The traditional culture and customs expect a Naga woman to be obedient and humble; also expect her to perform the roles of wife, mother, child bearer, food producer and household manager. Women are highly respected and given a great deal of freedom. However, they are traditionally not included in the decision-making process of a clan or a village.

With the change of time and the introduction of the new Christian faith and modern education, a host of traditional practices disappeared. Along with it grew a concern for the status of women. Due to advancement of modern education especially among the women, led to the awareness for the need to improve the status of women in the society. The role assigned to women in traditional Naga society did not qualify her equal status with men and thus women began to fight for prominent role in the society because it is the role that determines the status of a person. Women in the past in Naga society were generally bound by host of social taboos and restrictions which greatly curtailed their participation in the society. However, Naga society have evolved and transformed to a large extent that, there has been a marked transformation in the status of women as well. Women are less viewed and considered as mere entities of procreation in the society. This transformation in the society can be attributed to Christianity, which believes in the equality of men and women; education, which plays a liberating role in the way women are viewed; and the other associations and organizations like the Naga Mothers' Association, which is the frontal body for women playing a vital role safeguarding the rights of the women.

Apart from this, there are other many women organizations representing different tribes, each playing a very important role in the uplift of status of women in the society.

Unlike the past Naga society, women today are no longer considered as mere house wives and child bearers, but instead play a more significant role in socio-economic development. Despite her contribution to socio-economic spheres of life, the dominant patriarchy in Nagaland denied women equal status and opportunity in electoral politics. For instance the participation of women is conspicuously missing in the political arena. Women are still struggling to gain a hold in the state political arena. Not a single woman has ever been elected to the Assembly in the state (though there was one or two contestant in some occasion). Table 1.1 shows the data of the contestants contested the State Assembly seat from 1964 to 2013. The only occasion when a woman was elected as legislator was in 1977 Lok Sabha election in which Rano M. Shaiza won the sole seat from the state (Ohja, 2014: 47). However, the participation of women as voters are higher than men in percentage, which positively encourage one to think that Naga women are moving ahead in terms of participation in terms of electoral process. Table 2.1 shows the detail percentage of men and women voted at each Assembly election (ibid.: 48; also see Amer, 2013: 91).

**Table 1:** Male/Female contestants in Legislative Assembly election 1964 to 2013

<b>Year of Election</b>	<b>Total number of Seats</b>	<b>Total number of Male contestant</b>	<b>Total number of Female Contestant</b>	<b>Total number of Female Elected</b>	<b>Differences of % male/female</b>
1964*	40	73	Nil	Nil	Nil
1969	52**	142	2	Nil	1.4
1974	60	219	Nil	Nil	Nil
1977	60	201	Nil	Nil	Nil
1982	60	245	Nil	Nil	Nil

1987	60	214	3	Nil	1.40
1988-89	60	140	Nil	Nil	Nil
1993	60	177	1	Nil	0.56
2008	60	-	-	Nil	-
2003	60	222	3	Nil	1.35
2008	60	214	4	Nil	1.87
2013	60	186	2	Nil	1.07
Total	60	1960	15	Nil	0.76

(Sources: Amer, 2013; for \* & \*\* supplementary sources from Toshimenla Jamir, 2008; *Nagaland-Fifty Years On Govt. of Nagaland*, 2013)

**Table 2:** Gender differences in voting in Nagaland (in percentage) (1969-2013)

Year	Votes			Voters who voted			% of Votes	
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
1964*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1969	93829	83102	176931	27169	67132	139338	76.94	80.78
1974	221223	173847	395070	161164	136484	297648	72.85	78.50
1977	214812	183223	398035	176666	154795	331461	82.24	84.48
1982	330290	266163	596453	240422	293500	440922	72.79	76.45
1987	319529	262772	582301	266033	225891	491924	83.25	85.96
1988-89	320611	261805	582416	273574	225248	498822	85.32	86.03
1993	427450	387355	814805	387448	347494	734942	90.64	89.70
1998**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2003	529517	485363	1014880	474181	417316	891479	89.54	85.98
2008	666391	635875	1302266	573021	549362	1122383	85.98	86.39
2013	-	-	-	581782	579291	1171335	89.82	91.22

(Sources: Amer, 2013; on data for the years indicated \* & \*\*, the sex-ratio data is not officially available)

Table 1 indicates women's participation as candidature is very poor. However, Table 2 indicates the percentage of the participation of female who turned up to vote is higher than male though male total number of voters are higher. The first and the ninth Assembly reports has been left out due to non-availability of data sex-wise.

Seeing the poor participation of women due to denial of opportunity to women to participate in decision making matter (not only in Nagaland), the Government of India, in order that the women should participate in decision making matters in the local self government, while amending 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment Acts, 1992 which inserted Part IX and Part IX-A in the constitution which relates to Panchayats and Municipalities, the Act clearly outlines, out of total number of seats 1/3 would be reserved for women to be filled by direct election (Basu, 2003: 273, 279). This Act clearly indicates for the 33 percent reservation of women in municipalities but in Naga society, the Act failed to be implemented as a result of Article 371A of the Constitution of India, which safeguards Naga customary laws. What is denied of the rights of women emerges directly from this Act that states that "no Acts of the Parliament shall apply to the State in respect of religious and social practices of the Nagas; Naga Customary Law and procedure and the administration of civil and criminal justice evolving discussion according Nagas customary law, unless the Legislative Assembly rectify it by a resolution". Thus, although Naga women occupies a respectable position in terms of sharing responsibility in the society and enjoys a considerable amount of rights and privileges, the reality is disheartening when the status of women are compared to men.

Such issue of inequality among women have now become a global concern. And in an effort to create awareness on this global concern, it was the United Nations that declared the year 2001 as the 'International Women's Empowerment Year'. Following this, in order to uplift women in the society, the Parliament has adopted a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women in the year 2001 and declared it as

Women's Empowerment Year for the country, with an objective to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure their active participation in all spheres of life and activities (Pal, Ghosh, & Bharati, 2008: 200; also see Tomer, 2006: 202, 227).

With the declaration of this Women's Empowerment Year in 2001, the Government of Nagaland has created the Department of Women Development during 2003-04, to act as an agent to with the primary responsibility of addressing the issue of the empowerment of women in Nagaland through their socio-economic uplifts. Primarily focussing on the socio-economic status of women, to safeguards the rights of women and to provide support services (Nagaland-Fifty Years On, 2013: 176).

With modernity, the status of women in Naga society seems to have greatly improved. Today, there are countless educated Naga women who contribute immensely to the growth and development of Naga society. Women occupy high position in both governmental and non-governmental sectors, at times securing an even higher position than men. However, despite such progress being made, the age old tradition and custom, the customary law and its relation, is still seen to persist wherein privileges to women in decision making and inheritance are denied. Because a culture and social norm plays a significant role in developing social attitude towards women, and the customs and tradition that contain gender disparity which denies equitable treatment, it is men that continue to dominate the Naga society.

## **End Notes**

1 Narrated by Dr. H.Y Chishi, Director, Indigenous Cultural Society, Dimapur, Dimapur on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

Religion is not a sudden development that took place in human society. It is a cultural universal, although specific beliefs and practices vary significantly from one society to another. The term religion is derived from the Latin term “religio” which means ‘to gather, count or observe’ or ‘to bind’. Religion is thus, belief in, and observation of, signs of Divine communication or the performance necessary action which may bind together man and the supernatural powers that be. Both the implication is relevant in view of the fact that beliefs and rituals have been found to be main component parts of religion everywhere (Majumdar, 1958: 179; also see Jha, 1994: 149). In western history, religion is referred to a ‘transcendent’ experience that individual had beyond normal, everyday social life in some cases, and at other times, it referred to ‘superstition’ or ‘piety’ (Scupin & DeCorse, 2009: 356). Again a more comprehensive definition suggests that religion consists of beliefs and behaviour related to supernatural beings and forces (Miller, 2011: 284). It has been difficult to define religion because it varies so much from one region and culture to another.

All societies have possessed beliefs that can be grouped under the term religion. These beliefs vary from culture to culture and from time to time. Yet despite their variety, religion can be defined as any set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to supernatural power, whether the power be forces, gods, spirits, ghosts or demons (Ember, Ember & Peregrine, 2007: 461). Religion is also defined as a set of rituals, rationalised by myths, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature. When people are unable to fix serious, anxiety-causing problems through technological or organizational means, they try to do so through manipulation of supernatural or spiritual beings and powers. This requires ritual or ‘religion in action’, which can be seen as a basic expression of religion. Its major functions are to reduce anxiety and

boost confidence, thereby helping people cope with reality. With this, religion is given a simpler definition – an organised system of ideas about the spiritual sphere or the supernatural, along with associated ceremonial practices by which people try to interpret and/or influence aspects of the universe otherwise beyond their control (Havilan *et al.*, 2009: 491).

Religion would simply mean living in the spontaneous awareness of, an encounter with, acknowledgement of, and obedience to the active reality of the presence of the Supreme Being. In the traditional tribal society, there were no irreligious people. In fact, people did not know how to live without religion. The tribal religion does not have written creeds to be recited, instead, the creeds are contained in the hearts and minds of the people and therefore, each one, family, clan and village is a living creed. For tribals, religion exists within the whole system of their being. In tribal religion, an individual life and the community life are inseparable. To be truly human is to belong to the whole community, including the ancestors and creation, and to do so involve the active participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. For the tribals, belief and action cannot be separated: they belong to one single whole world. Worship and action go together. Religion is doing. That means without belief and action, one cannot understand the religious meanings of the tribal. The tribal religion does not have any written creeds or scripture like other religion. The religious ethos is contained in the peoples' hearts, minds, oral history and rituals. People themselves are a living sacred scripture and the world of creation is the exegesis of the Supreme Being. Creation declares the Supreme Being. In other words, the tribal religious meaning cannot be grasped without creation. People see the self of the Supreme Being in creation and the Supreme Being speaks to the people through creation. Another peculiarity of the tribal religion is that unlike other religion of the world, it does not have founder or reformer. Their religion is not centred in a great historical person or persons. Rather their religion is centred on earth/creation (Longchar, 1995: 5-7).

#### **4.1: Naga Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Ritual beliefs and practices surround all of Naga social activities. In traditional Naga society, one cannot find any event or occasion without the initiations of any rituals. The traditional religion of the Nagas is commonly known as 'animism'. Animism is a word derived from the Latin word '*anima*', meaning 'breath'; hence carries with it the idea of soul and spirit. Animism implies the attribution of a living soul to inanimate objects and to natural phenomenon, as well as belief in the existence of soul or spirit as distant and apart from inert matter. The Nagas adhered to a belief in the existence of soul or spirit in matters and recognised the presence of an unseen higher power which exercised control over man's destiny and was entitled to obedience, reverence, and worship. These beliefs were expressed through their worship of nature and natural phenomenon and through their faith in power of magic and omen (Sema, 1986: 34-35). However, it is difficult to generalise as to whether the Nagas were animist. Jacobs (1990) points out that traditionally, Nagas were described as animist, as they believed in the existence of spiritual beings inhabiting the natural world, but this is half true because they also believed in gods (Jacobs, 1990: 83).

The early Naga tribes believed in three distinct classes of spirits. The first category was the Creator or the High God. This God is Supreme and beneficent to mankind. This God does not interfere in the day to day activities of man, although represents the manifestation of the unseen divine power and the final destiny of mankind. The second level is the spirits of the sky. These spirits though they live high up in the sky, perform kind deeds to man. The third group are the earth spirits. These spirits live on the earth, in the jungle, lakes, field, village, trees, streams and everywhere on earth and were generally maleficent but could be propitiated through sacrifices (Sema, 1986: 35-37; also see Jacobs, 1990: 83). Nagas worshipped the supernatural, they feared the supernatural power. Naga religion according to Jacobs (1990) appears very simple and its faith and practice do not demand a spiritual or a mystical union with higher power. The gods and spirits are not so much affecting society directly, but rather have a particular relationship with the concept of fertility. Thus, when a sacrifice is offered, it was not to build a strong spiritual relationship

with the God or the gods but was either to appease maleficent spirits or to ask to intervene beneficially maximizing fertility like good crops, enemy head for warriors, for children, etc., (Jacobs, 1990: 83; also see Philip, 1976: 37). Thus, the lives of the Nagas are filled with constant fear of the countless maleficent spirits whose malevolent motives must be propitiated. Philips (1976) maintains that the spirits of the forefathers were also worshipped, especially in times of trouble. It was their belief that the spirits are always vigilant and desirous of adding more spirits to the spirit world. Departed spirits come and trouble the living to take them away to the spirit world. Ancestral spirits were believed to influence the crops and general prosperity of their descendants. Therefore offerings were made to appease the spirit of the ancestors (Philip, 1976: 39).

Avoidance of forbidden acts on days of prohibition is most important. The day of prohibition is called *genna*. *Gennas* are observed for the benefit of the individuals, households, clan, village, members of certain age group or sex group as the occasion may arise. Strict observance of *genna* was absolutely necessary for health, wealth and progress of the individual and community. Breaking *genna* is believed to bring a curse. When a *genna* is declared people are to abstain from normal work and avoid contact with the outside world. People from other villages were not allowed to come and visit the village that was observing *genna*. The *gennas* were observed to propitiate the malevolent spirits. These *gennas* varied from tribe to tribe (ibid.:39-40; also see Babu, 2004: 88-89).

Closely connected with these beliefs are practices such as head-hunting, and animal and human sacrifices. According to Furer-Haimendorf (1969), the practice of head-hunting was embedded in the belief that the occasional capture of a human head was essential for maintaining the fertility of the crops and well being of the community (as cited in Babu, 2004: 89) and human sacrifices were offered to ensure a good harvest (Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1908 Vol.XVII; cited in Babu, 2004: 89). In support of the practices of animal and human sacrifices, Bendangangshi points out that the *mithun* sacrifice is the highest and costliest sacrificial ceremony. This

sacrificial ceremony was noted by the colonial ethnographers as ‘feast of merit’. However, feast of merit cover only 30% of the *mithun* sacrifices (the *mithun* sacrifices were termed ‘feast of merit’ because such sacrifices could not be offered by everyone; the person who offered such sacrifices attained higher social status by providing a feast to the whole village). The *mithuns* were offered to God to save from illness and to wash away the sins, sanctify man both spiritually and physically. *Mithuns* were offered for redemption and full atonement of man’s sins and evil. A *mithun* or a cow is sacrificed if a man is said to have no days in his life. An animal life is offered to God in place of his life. In exceptional instances, human sacrifices were also offered. If a man is ill and is not cured even after many sacrifices, a man is sacrificed to save his life. Such persons were generally the slave. It has been said that the wife of an Ahom king was ill, and was predicted that to save her life, a human sacrifice must be made. So the king sent a messenger to the Ao area and asked them to sacrifice a man to save the queen. A man from Khensa village donated his servant to be sacrificed. Again a rich man from Settsu, an Ao village was ill and even after performing many sacrifices he was not cured or forgiven (as they believe that illness is due to some evil spirit and was caused by provoking the evil spirit and man is expected to perform certain rituals to appease the spirit that has been provoked). A servant was therefore sacrificed to save his life. Even after this he was told that he was not healed. He thus decided not to go anywhere so as not be killed by that incurable disease. One day however, while he was sleeping, a mouse loosen the robe of a shield which fell on his nostril and killed him.<sup>1</sup> W. H. Hunter (1897) mentions that slaves offered for sacrifices were those people who were captured in raids and sold for economic gains (cited in Babu, 2004: 89).

Nagas believed in the soul and life after death. They have complicated beliefs about the soul and it appears that human beings have two or more souls (Jacobs, 1990: 85). Aos believed that the soul in the sky waits to occupy a body that comes down to a house where a birth is to take place (Mills, 1926: 225), while Lothas have some vague belief in the incarnation of the soul and in some lower form of life (Mills, 1922: 119). However, the idea of the abode of souls varies from tribe to tribe. J.H. Hutton

states in *The Sema Nagas* (1926) 'the soul go to the Hills of the Dead, and from there pass into another world, sometimes conceived of as celestial, more often as subterranean, where they continue to exist much as they did in their mortal lives' (Hutton, 1926b: 211). The Nagas believed in the immortality of the spirit of man and in the transmigration of souls. They believed that there is a close link between the living and the dead. The land of a dead is thought of as in the sky or underground or on a far hill where the life there resemble the life on earth. But the land of dead is not the only destination after death, but believed that one of the several soul is likely to return as an insect or animals (Jacobs, 1990: 85). Epao (1991) has put forward two theories on the idea of life after death which leads to transformation of soul. According to the first theory, the departed soul goes to the abode of the death where all the spirits meet together and there is a repetition of family life as on earth. It is believed that there is a reunion of couples, friends and enemies as before. The second theory is incarnation and reincarnation for seven times. After death the spirit would become star or otherwise has to pass through seven stages of spirit life which eventually transformed into bees (Epao, 1991: 82). Such assumption depicts a similarity between the Hindus and the Nagas although the Nagas are not Hindus. The Nagas do not worship idols nor do they have a place of worship like the temple of Hindus. Lycanthropy was also in existence among the Nagas. It is believed that the soul of a man exists in an animal and if any untoward incident occurred to any of them it inflicts on the other. The man whose soul live in animal became aware of the condition of the animal. There is no physical transformation between the two but the soul functions in human and at the same time functions in animal (ibid.: 81).

Most Nagas bury their dead. Tools like spear, dao, shield and provision were buried along to help the deceased to continue his life and journey in the other world. The death is mourned by the family and close relatives for over a month in which cows and pigs were killed to feed the friends and relatives (Philip, 1976: 41). Nagas are also primarily dependent on agriculture. All festivals and religious ceremonies revolve around the agricultural cycle of the year. Almost all the ritual and *genna* that were carried out by the people were based on agricultural season. Festivals, feasts,

marriages were done in accordance with agricultural season (Vitso, 2003: 31). J.P. Mills in one of his monographs *The Ao Nagas* (1926) states that Naga religion is not a moral code. It is a system of ceremonies (Mills, 1926: 215).

#### **4.2: Role of Women in Traditional Religion**

In Naga traditional religious beliefs and practices, women were not given prominent role to play. Women were not appointed as priest, which was the highest post in religion. The priest hold a very high status in the society since all ritual and sacrifices which relates to the whole community or the village was performed by the priest. And any family related rituals and sacrifices were performed by the father. For women, it was only the widow who was entitled to perform family related rituals and sacrifices. Though women were not assigned role of a priest or play prominent role in performing rituals and sacrifices, yet womenfolk played a certain role. Any rituals, sacrificial ceremonies were incomplete without the participation of women, although she was barred from performing any of it.

The importance of participation of women in rituals and sacrifices is clearly put forward by Aier (1998), while talking about the role of women in Ao society. She states that life in Ao society was a continuous flow of festivals and ceremonies and none of it was ever observed without the presence of women. The husband acts as the family priest. While performing the sacrifices, the presence of the wife was essential as the sacrifice was thought to be more effective if she was present (Aier, 1998: 95). However, Jamir and Lanunugsang (2005) is of the view that women and children were generally not permitted to the village common altar and due to fear and superstition, they themselves would not go near such sacred places. Women could only assist her husband in household religious sacrifices by preparing all necessary items required for the worship such as food and wine (rice-beer). The Aos observed 26 public ceremonies and 13 family related ceremonies. In all such ceremonies, women were not allowed to fully participate except in certain public ceremonies like *Moatsu* (a Festival of blessing observed right after the completion of sowing of seeds in the field, invoking blessing upon the new grains in the field and also to protect new

crops from all sorts of pest throughout the season) and *Tsungrem mong* (Thanksgiving Festival observed just before the harvest, a pre-harvest ceremony) (Jamir and Lanunungang, 2005: 219). Whether it was the presence or assistance, but it was because of the participation of the spouse that enabled men to perform the sacrifices successfully.

Among the Konyaks, women were not allowed to participate in the religious ceremonies (Zehol & Zehol, 1998: 79). Only women who possessed supernatural power could act as messenger between God and men and were allowed to perform some rituals. Otherwise, all religious rituals were performed by men.<sup>2</sup> Leipa, an elder of Chi Village, Mon District maintains that certain rituals were performed before the clearing of the forest for cultivation and for that purpose, only male members would go.<sup>3</sup> However, it was the mother of the family who would go to field to harvest the first rice. On her way, she must abstain from looking to her right and left and would not talk to anyone. It was the mother who offered the first rice to the three upright stones used as the hearth.<sup>4</sup>

Among the Angamis, woman is regarded in certain ceremonies, she is considered as taboo in some matters. During the *Sekrenyie* (feast for purification), on the day of the sacred day of ritual called *pru* women were not allowed to fetch water from the spring or other source due to defilement. Even food cooked by women was not taken by men and they were prohibited to go near men or to even walk passed them. However, there were some sacred rituals that were performed by women like the *Kizie* a dedication of new house; *Mekhur Zie* an annual ceremony in remembrance of the dead; *Tsiakrii* starting of work in the field; *Liede* starting of harvest, and *Ki Kenyii* sanctification of harvest (Kelhou, 1998: 57-58). Thus though women were considered impure or unclean among the Angamis for some rituals, in others sacrifices it was she who performed the rituals. Nilika Mehrotra in her works on *Angami Naga Woomen : Some Reflections on Their Status* (1992) mentions that in *Nanyu* (Angami Traditional religion) there was a chief traditional religious practitioner known as *Zhevo* and a woman could never become a *Zhevo*. Health cures

and religious beliefs are closely associated in *Nanyu* and for this not only male *Shaman* (medicine man) called *Thermumia* but there were female *Shaman* called *Themumiapfu* as well who were believed to help in curing disease by consulting the spirits (Channa, 1992: 169).

Among the Semas, despite women belonging to the most productive class in agricultural occupation, they did not receive any recognition but remained as subordinate roles. This has been noticed in the form of isolation of women in agricultural ceremonies. The Sema agrarian structure has been shaped by varieties of legitimized law, religious law and their religion conceptualize the divinity as male (Khala, 2012: 4-5). There are many agricultural rituals from clearing to harvesting that depicts the role and status of women in agriculture. It provides oppressive unequal practice of offering, which give opportunity to private act and public dominance of men and isolation of women from public dominance and private affairs (ibid.: 37). The first ritual of Sema agricultural year is called *asuyekiphe* which marked the beginning of the *jhum* (clearing of the jungles). On the first day, the activities of women such as husking of paddy, spinning, weaving and sewing a string of beads were prohibited. It is believed that these activities of women may have ill effect on paddy. But in the case of men, they would perform grand ceremonies on their new field and then men may proceed to clearing of jungle. The next ritual is called *luwani*, which means completion of the patch that was left uncleared on the first day. The activities of women were limited and isolated. The next ritual takes place after the *jhum* field is burnt and ready for sowing. This is called *vesuvelo*, where the spinning, weaving, sewing, peeling, tying of bamboos and all works in the field are forbidden. Many rituals are performed till the harvest. Such rituals are both private and public which involve only men. There is a certain private religious act which is performed privately and later transformed to a public ritual called *aphikimithe* (chaste) rituals. All the male members remain chaste. This particular ritual emphasize on separate rituals (male) as required for the compliance of *aphikimithe* (chaste) rituals. Thus the Sema religious practice apparently favours private acts of men (ibid.: 35-38).

The Feast of Merit, which fulfils the high social and economic status of a man in the village, was very common among rich men in Naga society. But a widower cannot host a Feast of Merit because it was the wife as a woman who had to carry out the rituals alongside the husband (Vitso, 2003: 61). In order to gain higher status, a rich man shared his wealth by giving feast to the whole villagers. Feast allowed men the opportunity to advance in social status. For instance, according to Furer-Haimendorf, to rise in a social scale, an Ao had to give a series of feasts, defined by custom in every detailed, and a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of the community (Furer-Haimendorf, 1976: 47). Hosting of the feast of merit in which *mithun* was sacrificed was treated as most sacred and honourable act of a rich man in the village who was highly respected and his influence was considerably high. He and his family, the wife, sons and daughters were entitled to dresses befitting the merit of his wealth. A rich man was held responsible as well as respect in all organizations and societies in the Ao country (Jamir, 2012: 68). In the autocratic communities like Konyak, feast was monopolized by men of the Great *Angh* clans to enhance their power. The hierarchical Sema though they celebrate Feasts of Merit, it did not acquire status that would undermined the class basis of chiefly rule (Jacobs, 1990: 78). In the Sema feasting, women played an important role. The husband depended on her labour to undertake the series of feast and without her co-operation in production and labour, man could not gain his status. Sema women played public dominance at *Shikusho* (eating and drinking feast) which was the first feast. During this feast, the festal liquor must be first tasted by an old woman, who was called a *Yapu or Atsughukulhou* (an old woman who performs ritual). She receives the leg of a pig, which is hung over the door of the celebrant while he is on ritual and taken away by her afterwards. This old woman must have to cook during the rituals and she separates and throws away the share of meat to set aside the spirit (Khala, 2012: 40).

Jacobs (1990) while presenting a relation of male and female in rituals states that though Feast of Merit appear to be a ritual arena for men, women played an important role and there is an emphasis on male-female interdependence and co-

operation. First, a man must be married to give the feast. It was the wife who brews the rice beer which the man distributed to those attending the feast. The rice beer which the Sangtam women brews for the feast was not like the everyday beer but has a sacramental quality; rice was pounded in a ritual manner and was brewed on a new ritually pure fire. Second, it was not only the man but also the wife and her other female kin who acquires right to ornaments. Men and women co-operate and share the high ritual status acquired. While the men dominate in distribution (Feast) and exchange (in supervising marriages and trade), women were vital in production. Without the co-operation of women in production, the man was unable to gain status. The contribution of women in production was recognized (Jacobs, 1990: 131-132). Thus women played a significantly role in the Feast of Merit, without whose contribution a feast cannot be held.

Head hunting in many respects was a male cult. However participation and role played by women cannot be ignored as women played certain role in the head receiving rituals. For instance, the wife of an Angami warrior performs certain ritual feeding the skull with rice beer. It was also women who encouraged the men to undertake the head-taking as a pre-requisite to marriage (ibid.: 131). Even among the Aos, when a warrior returned home with a head, the wife welcome and greet him and she would feed the skull saying, 'I am feeding you, bring your father, your mother, your sons and your daughters here. My husband is a warrior' (Jamir, 2012: 58). As for the Konyaks, there is an altar for worship for every occasion. Women were not allowed to participate in any rituals. In head hunting, women were not even allowed to witness as it was very sacred.<sup>5</sup>

There were certain rituals performed during marriages and among the Konyaks, some of these were performed by womenfolk. For instance, during the marriages, the groom's sister or aunt performed a ritual by wiping the feet of the newly married couple with the leg of a chicken saying, 'chicken find their food by their feet, you too work hard and find your food'.<sup>6</sup> For the Lothas, the next day after marriage, ritual was performed by womenfolk to ward off the evil fortune on the new

couple. After the rituals, the groom present gift to the women. The women along with their gift carry two baggage of evil fortune called *Poniratssen Ha* (purification baggage), containing leaves, eggs, ashes, meat, wine, charcoal and ginger from the couple's house and place under a tree known as *Mejum* with a prayer. On that very night, two old women hopes to have a good dream of good fortune for the couple. Whether good or bad the dream is disclosed to the couple the next morning. For the Angamis, this sort of rituals were performed by women on the day of engagement by strangling a fowl and predicting by watching closely the position assumed by its leg on whether the marriage would happen. If the right leg crosses over the left, the omen is considered to be good. Both the boy and the girl must note of their dream that night and if both dreams have been good, then the old women discuss about the marriage with the girl's parents (Ezung, 2009: 10). Among the Aos, though no religious rituals were performed by womenfolk, the bride is taken to the house of the bridegroom in a bridal procession, in which the oldest woman of her clan leads the procession. Young women carry things of needs to start the new family (this is still practicing in some of the Ao Naga villages but in a modified manner). Rituals were performed by the groom's father but the eldest brother performs the rituals in the absence of father. Otherwise, the eldest clan member performs the rituals in the absence of both the father and brother.

During the birth of a child among the Angamis, after five days the mother of a child performs a ritual to bless the child with good fortune. The mother goes to the field along with the baby and collects a plant called *tsohe*, plucks seven or eight long leaves. She then breaks the leaf on the forehead of the child and utters words like 'may you live long and become strong', 'may no disease take you away', may you never be defeated' (in case of a boy). She then breaks the leaves on forehead, chin, upper and lower limbs, thighs and ankles. They sometimes tie these leaves on the wrist. But during death ceremony, the Angami women are not allowed to perform the last rites (Channa, 1992: 171 & 174). It is interesting to note that women were hired to mourn the death of a rich man or a rich warrior as mourner for few days till the stench of the corpse is carried away to the graveyard in Ao society. The mourner are

supposed to weep, cry aloud in the house of the deceased or outside, walking up and down the street of the village, wearing long wreath of bells as necklace called *Tsungtsungye* (a special necklace with small bells fastened to it, which was worn by rich ladies in dances during festivals). These mourners makes countless sounds of melodious tone quite synchronous to her weeping, speaking in a peculiar pitch connected with praises, eulogy, sobbing and wailing attributed to the deceased rich warrior<sup>7</sup> (also see Bendangangshi and Aier, 1997: 95-96).

From the above data, it cannot be denied that women in traditional Naga society did not play any role in religious matters. The seclusion of women in taking the major role is an imposition of oppression in the form of duty and women has no choice in such matter. This has been because of the patriarchal regulation.

## **End Notes**

1 Narrated by Bendangangshi of Ungma Village, Mokokchung District during an interview conducted at his residence at Ungma Village on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2010.

2 Narrated by Rev. Chingong, Mon during an interview at his residence in Mon on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2010.

3 Narrated by Leipa Toalem, Chi Village, Mon District. At his residence at Chi Village on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2010.

4 Narrated by Pastor, Mon Village Pastor, at his residence in Mon District on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2010

5 Narrated by Rev. Chingong, Mon during an interview at his residence in Mon on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2010.

6 Ibid.

7 Narrated by Bendangangshi of Ungma Village, Mokokchung District during an interview conducted at his residence at Ungma Village on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2010.

## CHAPTER 5

### NAGA WOMEN IN MODERN CHRISTIANITY

The 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an amazing growth of Christianity in Asia. It was a century of missionary zeal and expansion of the Church. North East India with its diversities, inaccessibility and problems of communication was no exception. This part of India was exposed to the Gospel in the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Khasi tribe of Assam (now Meghalaya) had the privilege of being the first to hear the Gospel and was spread to other parts of North East India. In 1812, it was Krishna Chandra Pal, an evangelist of William Carey, and the first fruit of Baptist Mission work in India, who brought the message of salvation to this people (Philip, 1976: 46). When the Gospel was brought among the Nagas, they strongly stood against this new religion. But with the untiring efforts of the missionaries, people gradually began to convert to Christians. Along with the new religion, the missionaries also introduced modern education to the Nagas. It was the Aos who had the opportunity to receive both Christianity and modern education, which gradually spread to other parts of Nagaland. Acceptance of new religion demands new religious activities and obligations and so the Nagas felt the breakdown of the old way of life.

Different missions from the West came to North East India and started their works. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission, later renamed as Welsh Presbyterian Mission in 1841 worked among the Khasis of Meghalaya, who later brought the Christian message to the Mizos between 1891-1897. J.H Lorrian and F.W. Savidge of the same mission started the work among the Abors and Miris in Arunachal Pradesh in 1898. It was the American Baptist Mission who started to work among the Garos in 1863 and the Nagas in 1872. The British Baptist Missionary Society also started work among the Mizos of the Southern region in 1903. The Roman Catholic Church also started its work among the people of North-East India in 1890 under the initiative of Salvatorian Missionaries. Likewise, the Lutheran Church

was introduced into the Gaolpara district by the Santal Mission in 1870s. Such were the early missions that brought Christianity to the people of North-East India. Along with this new religion, a new worldview derived from western culture, politics, science, technology, medicines, school and literature were brought to the tribals. Thus the Christian Missionaries brought a revolution in the tribal society (Longchar, 1995: 134-135).

### **5.1: Coming of Christianity to Naga Hills**

The first American Baptist Mission stations in North-East India were not established for the purpose of evangelizing the people of that area but as strategic outposts in a campaign to evangelize the Shan tribe of Northern Burma and Southern China. The first missionaries of this society were sent to Assam because of the interest among American Christians to evangelize China. Those missionaries working in Assam were identified as workers in the Shan mission, while work has been done among the Assamese as well but until 1841 (as Brahmaputra Valley mission started in 1841) the activities of the mission among the Assamese were looked upon as subordinate to the main objective of the mission which is the Shan mission (Downs, 1971: 14). A mission centre was established at Sadiya in Upper Assam as it would make an excellent centre for work among all the Shan people that inhabited central Asia, including China. The suggestion to establish mission centre for Burma Mission at Sadiya originated with C. A. Bruce, the British official in charge of the experimental tea plantations in that area. Bruce and his wife become interested in the tribal people, the Khamtis and Shingphos, whom they believed to be closely related to the Shans of Burma. The first American Baptist Missionaries who entered Assam was Nathan Brown and his wife, along with Oliver Cutter and his wife on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1836 who were appointed for the Sadiya mission centre. While travelling up the Brahmaputra, the missionaries spent much of their time learning the Shan language used in Burma but it was learnt that the Khamtis and Singphos whom the missionaries has taken into account as part of the Shan mission could not understand the Shan language. The second disappointment was the discovery that the population was not so large in the

region as they had been led to believe, and only a few Singphos who lived some distance away were remotely related to the Shans of Northern Burma. Thus reinforcement was immediately requested to work among the Singphos. Accordingly, Jacob Thomas and Miles Bronson were appointed but unfortunately Thomas died on the way as the boat in which he was travelling hit a tree and capsized. Thus only Miles Bronson, his wife and Mrs. Thomas reached Sadiya on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1837. Bronson soon looked for a suitable place to locate the Singpho centre and decided on Jaipur at the suggestion of C.A. Bruce, who had transferred himself there. The Bronson family and Mrs. Thomas moved to Jaipur in April, 1838. The missionaries at Sadiya could not stay there long due to the Khamti Attack on the Sadiya garrison in January 1839. Both Browns and Cutters decided to shift to Jaipur and thus abandoned the Shan mission (*ibid.*: 16-21; also see Philip, 1976: 47-48).

While working in Jaipur, Bronson came into contact with another people whose response seemed more promising, the Nagas who lived in the hills. The Nagas with whom Bronson made contact at Jaipur were from Namsang village. In January 1839, he decided to visit the village but was not immediately permitted to enter the village suspecting that he was a British agent that came to spy on the village and to conquer the village. He was later successful in persuading and convincing the villagers that he was not an agent or a spy and thus was permitted to enter and stay in the village. Bronson was now convinced to start a mission in Namsang and planned accordingly. His plan was approved by the Home Board and local British official as it would contribute to the British policy of pacifying the Naga tribes without administrative control over them and received financial support from British officials. This influenced the Home Board, and in 1839 appointed Cyrus Barker and his wife to work among the Nagas. Rhoda Bronson, sister of Miles Bronson also came with the Barkers to assist her brother. She was the first unmarried woman to serve the mission. Cyrus Barker who was appointed to work among the Nagas made it quite clear that he intended to work among the Assamese rather than the Nagas and was officially transferred to work among Assamese. The Bronsons opened a school at Namsang and pursued the parents to send their children to school. Rhoda Bronson even persuaded

the family to send their girls to school but strongly refused, stating that, who then, would work in the field and fetch their water? Due to tireless efforts made by the missionaries, there was an increasing friendliness and interest shown by the villagers but unfortunate serious difficulties soon developed. Rhoda Bronson has fallen ill and on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1840 on her way to Calcutta (Kolkata) for her treatment she died. Bronson wanted to establish a church in the Naga hills in 1842 but it was established only in 1872 in Ao Village after a lapse of 20 years by Dr. W. E. Clark (Downs, 1971: 21-26). It is generally accepted and believed that Dr. Clark brought Christianity to the Naga people in 1872, but even prior to that certain attempts has been made by the Christian missionaries. However, it was Dr. Clark who established a mission centre in the Naga Hills and thus was regarded the person who brought Christianity to the Naga people.

Dr. W.E. Clark came to Sibsagar from America to work among the Assamese in 1869. During his stay in Sibsagar, he came into contact with some Ao Nagas who came down to the plains for business/barter and ever since then he wanted to go to Naga hills and work among the Nagas. In October, 1871, Clark sent Godhula an Assamese convert, who worked as an evangelist, with his wife Lucy to Molungkimong, an Ao village in Naga Hills and nine young men converts came down with Godhula and were baptized and became members of Sibsagar Church. Immediately afterwards, on 18<sup>th</sup> December Clark made his first visit to the Naga Hills. He came from Sibsagar and reached Molungkimong. There he baptized fifteen converts on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1872. With this new converts along with the nine baptized at Sibsagar organised into a church at Molungkimong on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1872 and this was the foundation of a Church in the soil of the Naga Hills, which marked the beginning of Christianity among the Nagas (Molungkimong Baptist Church, 2001: 1; also see Thong & Kath, 2011: 237-38; and Downs, 1971: 63-65). Gradually Christianity spread to other parts of the Naga Hills. In order to reach to other Naga tribes apart from the Aos, a mission centre was needed to be established at an accessible place. Thus, a new mission centre was established at Impur (around 20 kilometres from Mokokchung District Headquarter) in 1894, which was initiated by

Clark (Walling & Longkumer, 2012: 10). This mission centre became a centre for the Aos, Semas, Lothas, Konyaks, Changs and Khiamungan tribes. Mission work in Kohima district was started in 1878 by Rev. C.D. King, while W. E Witter was sent to Wokha in 1885 ( Thong & Kath, 2011: 239-240). The Christian Missionaries along with the teaching of new religion among the Nagas, has also opened schools in different places. Along with the conversion and education, they also carried out both medical care and other social activities.

Introducing this new belief was not an easy task for the missionaries as they faced innumerable opposition in the initial years of their work from the local people. Many a times, the missionaries were suspected to be an agent of the British who were spying on them. The progress of the Christianity was slow at the beginning as the attitude of the Nagas towards the missionaries was hostile. Nagas were superstitious and strongly adhered to their traditional beliefs which made it difficult to accept any new system easily. The teaching of the new faith contradicts with their traditional beliefs and cultural practices. The new faith gave rise to differences between the converts and the non converts. This view can be supported by a confrontation that occurred between the converts and non-converts to new faith at Ungma village (an Ao village) under Mokokchung District.

#### *Case Study 1*

It is a tradition that when a *Pusu* ends and are replaced by the new *Pusu* (a *pusu* is a generation which is of 30 years, which may differs from village to village, the male representatives of each clan have the authority for village administration for that very period of time), there is a collection of all women who smoke either in case or kind to the give to the new *Pusu*. This is called *Mekolong Saru* (*mekolong*- tobacco smoked in certain kind of a pipe, *saru*-collection). The Church termed this *Saru* sin and restricted the collection which created a disagreement between the converts and non-converts. Thus a case was summoned in 1954 in Ongpangkong Court regarding this *Saru*. The court gave the verdict stating that since this is just a traditional culture this should be continued to preserve the rich culture.

Alongside the above case study H. Y. Chishi also strongly argues that the missionaries failed to balance traditional rich cultural values. The missionaries while spreading Christianity were not realistic and brought confusion to Naga society and distorted the Naga culture. Traditional attires were burned down terming them as evil and people were comply to follow the white people whom they think were superior<sup>1</sup>. However it cannot be denied that Christianity has over taken the old beliefs making Nagaland the Christian State.

Since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growth of Church has been tremendous. Because of this expansion and growth, it became difficult to manage the Christian activities under one organisation and therefore, each tribe formed an independent and self-supporting association under the umbrella of Nagaland Baptist Church Council (initially Naga Hills Baptist Church Council), which was formed in 1937 during a conference held at Ungma village, Mokokchung from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1937. (Walling & Longkumer, 2012: 33). This council is affiliated to the Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India, which is also affiliated to World Baptist Church Council. All these associations though affiliated to the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, are free to determine its own church policies according to local conditions. Formation of Christian Associations till the 1950s in Nagaland is given in Table 1.1, which indicates the growth of Christianity among the Nagas.

**Table 3:** Christian Associations and year of formation

<b>Name of the Association</b>	<b>Year of formation</b>
Ao Mundang (Ao Association)	1896
Angami Christian Association	1913
Lotha Christian Association	1923
Sema Christian Association	1929

Sangtam Christian Association	1946
Chakesang Christian Association	1949
Chang, Phom and Khiemungan (combine) Christian Association	1949
Konyak Christian Association	1951
Kuki Christian Association	1953
Zeliang Christian Association	1953

(Sources: F.S. Downs, 1971)

## **5.2: Role of Women in Religion in Modern Christianity**

It is apparently assumed by many Naga intellectuals and writers that the role and status of women have improved in Naga society with the coming of Christianity and western education. No doubt there was an overall change in the society. Christianity did not just bring about changes in religious beliefs but in many other traditional social practices which were considered as evil or sinful according to the Christian ethos and doctrine. At the same time, Christianity and western education played a significant role in uplifting the role of women in religion and other social aspects. But it cannot be denied that Naga women had been playing certain assigned roles in traditional religion though the most prominent roles were played by men. Women's participation could not be ignored because rituals were incomplete without her participation. She as a wife assisted her husband in preparation of the rituals but due recognition was not given to her unlike her husband.

One cannot ignore the importance of modern education while studying the coming of Christianity and the participation of women in this new system of religious beliefs. Christianity and modern education came to the Naga people at the same, and thus compliments each other for its spread and growth. In fact, it should not be ignored that the education was the means for propagation of Christianity as well as

indoctrination. Christianity with its religious text (the Holy Bible), the new converts in order to read the Holy book needed to learn to read, this is where modern education, which taught them both to write and read became important. While Dr. Clark worked vigorously teaching and preaching, Mrs. Clark devoted herself in delivering modern education. When this modern education started, in the beginning the parents did not favour sending their daughters to school and this is evident from what Dr. Clark wrote in his letter detailing that, ‘on asking the villagers to send their daughters to school, the shrewd reply was who then will fetch water, cook and do household works’ (Aier, 1998: 98). But gradually changes occurred and this was due to the initiative of Mrs. Clark who permitted girls to come to their bungalow to learn in the evening when all their works were done. She mentions that “a few larger girls whose work would not permit their attendance mornings, came each evening to the bungalow, chatting merrily, lighting their path with torches or firebrands. After an hour with books, sewing, and conversation about the new religion and other matters, the torches were brought to a blaze, a pleasant good-night salaam was given, and these bright, happy girls were off- girls whom any one might enjoy the effort to elevate” (Clark, 1907: 85). Mrs. Clark has put every effort to educate the people thus she opened a school at Molungkimong and when they shifted to Impur, she opened school there as well. She has also opened school for girls which are the most significant thing that paved the way for women’s education (Thong & Kath, 2011: 238). It was the boys who got the privileges of receiving modern education and this is evident from what F. S. Downs has written while writing about the school at Aizuto Mission Centre (Zunheboto District). He mentions that “gradually the school was improving with girls being admitted for the first time in 1946. In that year there were 20 girls and 230 boys enrolled” (Downs, 1971: 153).

When Christianity was introduced among the Nagas, it was men who first converted to Christianity, not women. The nine people who were first baptized by Clark were all men. Since women were confined to household activities, they did not get the privilege to meet the missionaries before the men folk, because it was the male member or the father of the family who looks to affairs outside the household.

However, it did not take too long for the mission to receive the active participation of women. The first Naga woman convert was Tungbangla of Molungkimong Village. This is evident from what Mrs. Clark has written. In her account, she mentions, “one evening when the people were gathered in goodly numbers at the mission bungalow for the usual prayer meeting, Tungpangla, one of the schoolgirls, arose and said, I believe on this Jesus, accept him as my only Saviour, and I wish to be numbered among his followers. Her’s was the first Naga woman’s voice ever heard making the great confession” (Clark, 1907: 85). Tungpangla and another schoolgirl Noksangla, were soon baptized. Tungpangla did not just convert to Christianity but contributed by actively participating, rendering her valuable help to the missionary. She started teaching in school and also accompanied Mrs. Clark visiting from house to house. She was the first to receive Christian marriage. She later moved to Yazang village where she started a day school and taught scriptures. When more people began to convert and baptized, a church has been organized choosing an elderly man as their pastor (Clark, 1907: 85-86). Though it is presumed that Christianity has brought changes, the induction of man as a pastor, from the earliest stage of Christianity in Naga hills, despite women’s active participation, indicates that the role of women was undermined by her gender. This is one instance of how the early customs and traditional outlook still persisted.

From the time of inception of Christianity among the Nagas, the roles played by women are significant. The feeling to sacrifice and strife for the welfare of the community develop among women. This is evident from what Bendangangshi notes of an epidemic spread at Ungma village (an Ao village at Mokokchung) in 1932 which took the lives of many people. At that time, there were not many converts, and the people who still practiced the traditional beliefs, believed this to be the work of evil spirits and stayed away from those infected as the Nagas attributes all sickness as design of the evils. It was only those converts who helped the sick, visiting from house to house, and praying for them. One of the active volunteer among the converts was Pangeryangla, a female convert who relentlessly helped the sick and while doing

her duty for the welfare of her people, she too got infected by the epidemic and died in 1932<sup>2</sup>.

With the passage of time, Nagaland became a Christian State, teaching the principle of equality of all men. However, women are not appointed as Pastor, the leader of the Church or the member of deacon board, which is the decision making body of the church. There are many difficulties to appoint women as church leader, and one of the major reasons is that, the people who appoint the leaders are all men<sup>3</sup>. A separate Women Department was constituted which looked after the welfare of women within the church. Under this department a woman is appointed as women leader or associate woman pastor. This kind of separate department for women are not seen in the traditional religious beliefs and practices. Thus, there seem to develop some changes in the roles assigned to women in religion. But denial of women as Church leader indicates that, the old practices still persist. The department that constituted for the welfare of women cannot take any decision without the consent of the pastor or the deacon board of the Church. This indicates that the church is dominated by the male members.

Not only did every church have Women department but there are Women Association under every Christian Association in all the Naga tribe. In order to bring all the Naga Christian Women Associations of every tribe under one Association, during the Ao Christian Association (Ao Mungdang) session held at Sungratsu in 1965, the Ao Baptist Women Association proposed to adopt a resolution to form the Naga Baptist Women Union. Thus during the Nagaland Baptist Church Council annual session held in Zunheboto in 1967, the Naga Baptist Women Union was formed on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1967 (Walling and Longkumer, 2012: 34).

With the growth of modern education and better opportunities for women to pursue their education, a number of educated Naga women emerged. These women began to earn for their family along with their husbands or in some cases, women were the only bread earner of the family. Women equally contributed to the socio-economic development of the society. Modernity broadened the perceptions of the

people and this paved the way for women to actively participate for the growth and development of the society. Today, there are many educated Naga women who holds high administrative post in government and non-governmental organisations.

After Independence, India opted for the western model of democratic political system, which guarantees freedom and equality for all citizens. On the contrary, according to Dipti Sharma (1993), the position of women in the society is determined on the basis of the social values, and the trends or tendencies prevailing in the society. Thus, even though women in democratic India assumed to be enjoying their rights to the fullest extent, in reality women's democratic freedom are curtailed by the rigidity of the prevalent social customs and society (cited in Gassah, 2008: 165). This same attitude towards women in Naga society is no different. Although there are many educated women who excel in different fields like men, inequality between men and women still continue to persist in the society. This is evident from the voice of discontent in many different women organizations in Naga society, led by the Naga Mothers' Association and other women Organization across Nagaland.

These women organizations have started with an aim to fight for the rights of women and also to fight against all evils in the society. For instance, the aims and objectives of the Angami Women Organization are to fight for women's rights and to present the cause of the oppressed women before higher authorities and fight against anti-social activities (Kelhou, 1998: 59). The Sema Women Association strive not only for better status in social, political and educational fields, but also strive their best to do away with all kinds of social stigmas that hinders the community without degrading their feminism (Zhimomi, 1998: 52). The Watsu Mungdang, the apex body of Ao Women Organizations aims to improve the social, cultural, political and religious life of the people and encourages women's participation in developmental schemes. Thus, it deals with socio-economic promotion; development and advancement related to women issues (Aier, 1998: 99). The Rengmas, like the Angamis is one of the tribe from Kohima, who inhabits the Tsumenyu area under Kohima District, also resolve to organize their own Rengma Mothers' Association

with its own written constitution, to check and curb the social evils affecting the family and society, to exert themselves and to extend all possible help to the administration (Kath, 1998: 89). Also, the main objectives of the Konyak Nyuyong Sheko Khong (KNSK), which is a Konyak Women Association is to ensure that education facilities are given to all girls and to eliminate the evil practices which had for so long prevailed in Konyak society (Zehol & Zehol, 1998: 81). Mrs. Yomah, President KNSK is of the opinion that the reason for starting this association is to bring the Konyak women forward<sup>4</sup>.

The emergence of Christianity and modern education had a strong effect on the Naga culture. As a result, the whole system of life changed in the process of development. Attitude towards the place of women in the church are rapidly changing. Such process of defining and redefining the states of women are a continuing process (Khala, 2012: 41). With time and progress, women in the church have begun to take active participation. Today there are many qualified women theologians who are eligible to serve as pastors. But the role of women in the Church has always been defined in largely by the traditional role of women in the Naga society. The subordinate role they played in traditional society continues to be reflected in the role permissible to them by the men who controls the Church. Higher positions in the Church are denied to women. Although there is women leaders in Women Department under the Church, who are Associate Women Pastor, they do not overall head the Church. Opportunities are denied to women, not because they are found unqualified and are unwilling to serve as pastors or Church leaders but because of the traditional attitudes and perceptions towards the appropriate role of women in the society.

There are also few women Ordained women serving as Reverend in Naga Churches. These ordained women serve in different capacities in the church ministry. In rural churches, women are still not given the privilege to become a pastor or a member of the Deacon Board. There was however a breakthrough in the church history of Nagaland when an Ao woman by the name Rev. (Mrs) Senangshila was

appointed as pastor of Sungratsu Church, an Ao Village in 1990s (Walling & Longkumer, 2012: 24). Her appointment as pastor of the Church is a strong indication of how women can play better role than just mere active participants of the church. Despite such progress, there was many opposition of appointing women as pastor. Rev. L.T. Maja maintains that, when the church appoints a woman as pastor, the church endures both practical and economic disadvantages. The village administration and the church functions side by side and the church have to consult the village administration at many occasions and held consultative meetings. This is when women as a pastor would encounter difficulties taking into account the Naga customs and traditional practices in which women are not allowed to participate or be a member of the village council. Also woman as a pastor would cost more to Church because during her tours and travel as a pastor to attend conference and seminars along with one *mapangsur*<sup>5</sup> a women member from the women department accompanies to assist her. In case of male pastor, he will be accompanied by only the *mapangsur* to assist him. Thus women as a pastor would causes economic disadvantages to the Church<sup>6</sup>. Bendangangshi is also of the opinion that people were against the appointment of woman as pastor, as people still have a stronghold on traditional cultural practices, so she could not work for long<sup>7</sup>. During the research period survey has been conducted among men regarding their opinion on the appointment of women as pastor. Almost all the respondents are of the opinion that they are 80% not objectionable to appoint women as pastor if only they are capable and qualified but 20% they feel that customs and traditions does not permit women to be a leader. There are also opinions of the people that society would not want a sudden change. Thus men cannot accept women being their leader. The opposition of the people, different opinions and comments indicates that society cannot accept the bigger role of women in the church.

What is evident from the varied opinions above is that Christianity has not yet completely displaced the age-old traditional practices. Christianity is a social institution upholding the value of equality and justice but the traditional patriarchal structure of the of the society still influence the socio-political and cultural system.

Christianity has been conveniently blended with traditional customs and tradition. The year of women (1975) and the Women Decades (1976-1986) have elapsed, but within the Church community there is no reappraising for change. The church is lagging behind the secular society. Women are barred from Church central decision making body and planning. The Church continues to be a male-dominated institution. It has adopted the patriarchal framework and has implemented on its members the prescribed rules and behaviour of paternity in such a way that women accept it to be a natural order. Men are considered the most trusted custodians of the Church heritage and do not share honour and privilege with women. (Khala, 2012: 41-42).

Memo (2004), suggested that in almost every religion and cultural identity, the patriarchal interpretation of culture signifies that the community culture belongs more to women and less to men. That is why even in so called modern age, the community proved assertion of identity is always marked on the basis of women first (cited in Khala, 2012: 42). In the name of culture, women are oppressed by their community, which tries to draw them aside indigenous cultural folds. The feminist consider the reason behind the marginalization of women as a way of patriarchal domination. When a child is born, he/she is immediately socialized and assigned gender roles by the society, thereby giving unequal status to the two different sexes and also introducing the gendered division of labour. In patriarchal societies, since men dominate the religious institutions, social structure, family, etc., there is a total lack of women's perspective. Though women make up half of the world's duties, her opinions are decided by the patriarchal norms of the society. The main reason for such exploitation is due to lack of gender sensitivity among both men and women (Phukon, 2008: 163).

## End Notes

- 1 Narrated by Dr. H. Y. Chishi, Director, Indigenous Cultural Society, Dimapur, on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2012
- 2 Narrated by Bendangangshi, Ungma Village, Mokokchung District at his residence at Ungma Village on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2010.
3. Dr. H. Y. Chichi Op.cit
- 4 Narrated by Mrs. Yomah, President, Konyak Nyuyong Sheko Khong, at her residence in Mon Town, Mon District on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010.
- 5 *mapangsur* – this is an Ao term. Mapangsur is a male members appointed by the Church to assist the Pastor and the Deacon boards in functioning the Church.
- 6 Narrated by Rev. L.T. Maja, during an interview at his residence at Yimyu ward, Mokokchung on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2010.
- 7 Bendangangshi, op cit.

## CHAPTER-6

### CUSTOMARY LAW AND STATUS OF WOMEN

#### 6.1: Tribal customary law

Customary law refers to the law, practices and customs of indigenous and local communities which are an intrinsic and central part of the way of life of these communities. Customary laws are imbedded in the culture and values of a community or society; they govern acceptable standards of behaviour and are actively enforced by members of the community. Garner (2004), in his “black law dictionary” points out that in the primitive society, the rules or laws were framed by a collection of individuals. Individuals formed into a family, and the families expanded into a community and community into society, clan and tribe. For the guidance of its members, certain rules and principles of code of conduct were established. It continued for ages and became a common practice which was handed down from generation to generation and that practice came to be regarded as sacred tradition and customs. Thus a custom as is practiced, by its common adoption and long unvarying habits, has come to have the force of law (cited in Hina, 2012: 21). Paras Divan (2005) also notes that when human beings came to live in groups it was by nature that, for a harmonious group life, they should conform to certain patterns of human behaviours. In course of time, a pattern of behaviour emerged and by consistent adherence to it, achieved spontaneous and conscious following by the member of the group. When a uniform and persistence usages has moulded the life and regulates the dealings of a particular class of community, it becomes a custom (ibid.: 21-22). Similar to the views of Garner and Divan, Khala (2012), also states that the customary law of any given society has been emanated out of a body of observation, norms, tradition and usage of customs since the dawn of human civilization. The traditional laws and customs are informal sanctions, which require some degree of conformity from a member of a society. The social behaviour, which is strengthened by

recurrence ultimately, gives rise to an enforcing authority, which in its structure and system, continues as trends of custom transmitted from one generation to another generation and becomes the source of customary law. Custom is not law but it controls the code of conduct and becomes a binding force for the members of the society (Khala, 2012: 22).

Custom is a major source of law and it regulates human behaviour in nonstate (tribal) societies when written laws were not in existence. Customary is habitual which is usually done and law is the collection of rules according to which people live. It must be noted that custom is not law imposed by state but when customs are recognized and get accepted then they attain the status of law. There is no written record on how nonstate law has been practiced; it is an unwritten law which has been sanctioned through custom and tradition which is transmitted orally through generations that practices on peoples opinion, serve as a general sanction for observation of traditional norms. Thus law is backed by customs and traditions, and its social sanction is related to religious practices and usages, and various other local traditions.

Miller (2011) has put forward two major instruments of social control as has been distinguished by Cultural anthropologist: norms and laws. A norm is generally agreed upon standard for how people should behave, usually unwritten and learned unconsciously through socialization and law is a binding rule created through custom or official enactment that defines correct behaviour and the punishment for misbehaviour. Systems of law are more common and more elaborate in state-level societies, but many nonstate societies have formalized laws. Religion often provides legitimacy for law. The Australian Aborigines believed that law came to humans during the *Dreamtime* (also called dreaming), a period in the mythological past when the ancestors created the world. The terms 'law' and 'religion' are synonymous in the contemporary Islamic states and much western law is based on Judeo-Christian beliefs, though secular western states consider their laws to be religiously neutral (Miller, 2011: 242-243).

In general, tribal societies have no formal courts and no lawyers. However, in such societies, there are some individuals, usually older males, who are highly skilled in negotiation and conflict resolution. This position is sometimes occupied by the priest because law in nonstate society is a part of natural and supernatural principles. But the final decision of the litigation procedure can be reached only when a consensus is achieved among the different groups. In some situation, if the conflicts between the two groups cannot be resolved by mutual understanding, then it is decided by taking oath and ordeal. The accused or the offender has to take an oath and then is asked to state whether he has committed the offense or not. It is generally believed that if the offender lies, he is punished by supernatural powers for taking false oath by falling misfortune on him. Because an oath is attempt to call on supernatural source of power to sanction and bear witness to the truth or falsity of an individual testimony (Scupin & DeCorse, 2008: 224-225). The other form is the ordeal, in which the accused are put to torture before the declaration of the judgement and if he escapes without injury, then he is found not guilty. The belief behind this kind of treatment is that the supernatural powers help the innocent (Sharma, 2010: 284).

Punishment awarded to the guilty depends on the crime committed. It could be a fine in cash or kind or both depending on the crime committed and the capability of the person. The fine is usually spent in giving a communal feast or as an offering to the supernatural power (Jha, 1994: 146). The nonstate society is a close-knit groups and thus dispute tend to be handled at the interpersonal level through discussion or one-on-one fight. Group members may act together to punish an offender through shaming and ridicule. Emphasis is on maintaining social order and restoring social equilibrium, not hurtfully punishing an offender. Ostracizing (forcing the person to leave the group) an offending member is a common means of punishment. Execution or capital punishment is rare. In some Australian Aboriginal societies, law restrict access to religious and paraphernalia to men who have gone through a ritual initiation. If an initiated man shared secrets with an uninitiated person, the elders would delegate one of their groups to kill the offender. Punishment is often legitimized through belief

in supernatural forces and their ability to affect people. Kuipers (1990) reports among the highland horticulturalists of the Indonesian island of Samba that one of the greatest offences is the failure to keep a promise. Breaking a promise would bring on supernatural assault by the ancestors of those who have been offended. The offenders may punish in the form of damage crops, illness or death of a relative, destruction of the offender's house, or catch on fire by one's own clothing. When such things happen, the only recourse is to offer a ritual that will appease the ancestors (Miller, 2011: 244).

A question that has continuously engaged the Anthropologists has been how law is obeyed. Various answers has been given: because of the compulsiveness of the public opinion; equation of laws with ethical norms which make a breach of the laws as sin, punishment for which is supernatural visitation; and is obeyed spontaneously, willingly and blindfolded or slavishly. Malinowski (1949) fails to agree to this wherein he shows that there was no automatic submission to law. Interdependence and mutual obligation made people to obey law. If one does not do one's duty, by others, one cannot expect them to do anything for one's own sake. He further illustrates this mutuality of obligation by the economic, social and ceremonial ritual of the Trobriand Islanders. He showed that unless the beach-dwellers exchange fish for the garden produce of those living in the interior, and *vice versa*, neither group will be able to survive. Consequently, mutual obligations must be fulfilled. These obligations are embodied in tribal laws, and the same are obeyed because of self-interest and its fulfilment. Economic interest is one of the dominant self-interest which governs the emergence of, and obedience of law (Majumdar & Madan, 1986: 181).

## **6.2: Law and Justice: Comparisons between Nonstate and State Society**

In nonstate society, the growth of law is a slow and spontaneous process of usages and customs being given the sanction of time and force. There is no legislation as in states society. Whenever laws come into existence, it is not a selected group of individuals, like a legislature who are responsible for it, but the society as a whole. There is no sustained conscious and deliberate attempt of making or modifying the

law in tribal society. There are some basic differences between the laws of modern state and the laws of nonstate. According to R.H Lowie (1920), an American anthropologist, there are three main differences:

- i. Nonstate law depends on the bond of kinship and not on territorial relation.  
On the other hand, modern law is related to a specific area.
- ii. Nonstate law is very much similar to moral principles and practices and public opinion, whereas modern law can also be immoral and against public opinion.
- iii. Nonstates law makes no distinction between public and private crimes, but such a distinction is found in modern law (cited in Majumdar & Madan, 1986: 177; Sharma, 2010: 282-284; & Jha, 1999: 139)

In the state organization, with more social stratification and more wealth, increased social stress occurs in relation to distribution of surplus, inheritance, and right to lands. Thus a different system of social control is imposed. In states organization, there are specialization of tasks related to law and order performed by police, judges and lawyers. These professionals are often members of powerful social groups that perpetuate elite biases in the justice process. Unlike in nonstates, where the offenders are punished by supernatural power and guilt may be determined through oaths and ordeals, on the other hand the court system with lawyers, judge and jury is used in most contemporary societies, where physical presence of witness and their cross-examinations are the basic source of evidence. Punishment to offenders is imprisonment and capital punishment (Miller, 2011: 244-246). Again in nonstate society, the punishment may not be awarded only to an offender but to any member of the family or kinsmen, which is not relevant in modern legal system. In a nonstate, there is a feeling of collective responsibility because it rest on the principle of kinship bond. Each kin group has to defend itself and demand that amends be made for wrongs done. But in state such a collective responsibility is not accepted. If the state decides in support of the offenders, there is no such group important or competent enough to participate in the process of arriving at the decision. Only an appeal can be

made in the law court against the state action. In modern society, intention of an offender is recognized as an important determinant of the legality or illegality of a person's action. But these considerations are regarded irrelevant in nonstate society because of supernatural punishment which is often feared to come as a visitation on the whole community in view of the fact that a breach of law is equated with sin (see Mujamdar & Madan, 1986; Jha, 1994; Sharma, 2010).

Thus in a nonstate society, social control is sanctioned by the tradition and customs which is closely connected with religious practices. While in states, society is controlled by a given codified law based on scientific and logical explanation. The judgement is given by the chief or the elders according to their customs and tradition in nonstates, on the other hand there are specialization of roles in state organization.

### **6.3: Naga Customary Laws and Status of Women**

Customs is what, that depicts the inherent way of life of the people through their uniform and consistence practice of life-style, tradition, eating habits, organisation of social life, religious rites, and matrimonial alliance. This custom varies from region to region and from group to group. Speaking of the Naga customary practices, Akang Ao (2004) notes that the Naga customary practices especially in the aspects of formation of villages, dispersal of land, social and cultural life, food habits, dresses, matrimonial alliance, engagement in war, settlement of dispute, treaty making and form of worship were by and large same with minor variation from the remote past till date (cited in Venuh, 2004: 38). The Naga customary law can be said to be a part of the society because the existence of the customary law is as old as the tribe itself. Nagas are tribals and like any other tribal society, the Nagas also have strong customary law which is still practicing side by side with the modern legal system. The role of both men and women are important in society and no society will progress without full participation of women. Without their effective roles or presence, a society will be incomplete. But customs and tradition do not give women equal rights and status. A Naga woman plays important role and she is protected and respected,

but are given less customary privileges though they get maximum customary bindings. Women had to live by the terms and conditions of the traditional customs.

Vitso (2003) in her work among the Chakhesangs clearly indicates how often traditions and customs discriminate women. She is of the opinion that some of the traditions and customs that were followed or practiced were for the benefit of women but such traditions, sometimes, were the causes of discrimination against them. Traditions and customs were based on myths and beliefs that disobeying such laws were punished heavily, sometimes to the extent of being ostracised from the society or death (Vitso, 2003: 58). Her view is very valid when we look at the Naga traditional practices. The Naga society is a patriarchal society where men is regarded as the head of the family and the men takes all the prominent role in all the socio-political and cultural activities which defines his status higher than women. While women are confined to the domestic chores and, are kept away from public affairs. Vitso further asserts that taboo were supposed to be protective and preventive especially for women. The harmonious co-existence of the people depended mainly on women as can be seen in the various laws made where the morality of the people was concerned. Women were controlled not by law but by custom. There is a general view that women in tribal society enjoy equal status with men but when it comes to the working of the customary law, women do not enjoy equal rights as that of men. In many instances, women's roles and status were determined by social institution and norms, ideologies and taboos (ibid: 58). The factor which resulted in denial of the women to acclaim the status as equal to that of men are the denial of her participation in village administrative system; the role assigned to her as assistance to her husband for the economic subsistence of the family; role assigned to her as a helper and assistance to her husband in all religious rituals; denial of inheritance of landed property; marriage, divorce and custody of children:

**6.3.1: Political Status:** The administration and the polity of the village in the traditional or in the present society is male dominated. This indicates that women barely have any political power in Naga society. The traditional polity of the villages

varies from both democratic to Chieftainship. But at present, it is the Village Council headed by a Chairman in all villages that governs the Naga villages today. The member of the council consists of male representatives from each clan or *khel* (Ao, 2004: 39). This village council is the decision making body of the village. Women were barred from being a member of the Village Council. Women were not allowed to participate in public debate and discussion and even at present, women are not given such privileges to share her opinion. Among the Konyaks in traditional society the Great *Angs* (chiefs) were not only the political leader or administrative head but were also sacred. They were both dominant in secular and ritual and sense. (Jacobs, 1990 : 69). At present the Konyaks also practice the village council system of administration, though the *Angs* exist. Thong and Kath (2011) shared their reason to this. According to them, head hunting, feast of merits and other social, religious political, and economic activities involves the whole male population and in this situation women also had to struggle with much hardship relating to household affairs and child caring. Such situations do not permit women to participate in decision making of the village states (Thong & Kath, 2011: 99). This view however, cannot be simply accepted as the reason for such non-participation. They have mentions that in spite of all these heavy engagement, she finds considerable time to participate freely in singing and dancing during festival and at times of entertaining guests (ibid.: 99). Thus it was not due to time constrained or her incapability rather it was the custom and tradition that restricted her to play bigger roles. For instance, among the Aos, women are not allowed to be a member of the Tatar Menden (village council) neither is she a member of the Senso Mungdang (a kind of village citizen forum) because membership fees are collected only from male members. This speaks volumes on how women are not even regarded as legitimate citizen of the village society. Women are neither allowed to attend nor share her opinion in any village public meetings for when a village meeting is organised by the Village Council or the Senso Mundang, although a village meeting, women participation were unwelcomed. Most important affairs of the village are discussed in such meetings. She could only give an advice or

share her opinion to her husband at home before he leaves for such meetings. Attitude of such nature is prevalent in all Naga tribes.

Women were made to obey, follow the decision made by the men folk, village authorities or the tribe even if there were some decisions to which she disagree. Traditionally, women never questioned the credibility of men and this tradition and customs is still in practice in Naga villages. Thus, the denial of power to make decision undermines the status of women. Even if women were denied the authority to make decision, the participation of women in the village political system by obeying to all decision of the authority, and by abiding to it should be acknowledged.

**6.3.2: Economic status:** In Naga traditional society, women were confined to the four walls of the house, while the men engaged in outside public activities. This indicates that women do all the household activities and while men earn for the living. Physical disabilities were made the major reason for the distinction of roles between men and women but it should be noted that biological condition was not the reason for it. To a larger extent, the traditional custom restricted the mobility of women (Vitso, 2003: 69)

Agriculture is the main activity for sustenance, or the occupation of the people of the village. Their live revolves around the agricultural activities and men and women assist her husband in clearing the jungles, tilling the soil, path clearing and threshing the paddy. But sowing paddy, weeding and winnowing were mostly done by the women. Reaping of the field was the work done together by both men and women (Thong & Kath, 2011: 100-102). Thus in comparison women seemed to have contributed more towards the economy of the family.

Among the Semas, ownership of land by men has conferred oppressive exploitation on agrarian women. Disinherited and with lack of control over its resources, women are rendered powerless and reduced to landless agricultural labours and become dependent on men for economic and social security (Khala, 2012: 8). The customary law afford men more customs and practices to constrain women in terms of

ownership of agricultural land and its resources. There is a greater disproportion in customary law on agricultural production which is due to the land policy that is controlled by men in decision-making on crops and land (ibid.: 9). The percentage of women working in agriculture is higher than men, with cheaper labours. Her agricultural work is considered a natural extension of household work. She concentrates on production of food for local market or for the domestic use within her capacity. It is noted that Sema women played a multidimensional role in economy. However, their hard works are never recorded nor attended. The role of women in farming indicates the utilization of female labour, which is higher than male labour. But they do not have control over the means of production and the income earned. Traditionally, since women have been hard working, attending to all the household chores and agricultural work, so it may be conceived that female labourers are easily amenable to working hours without additional wages. Women continue to be clustered as less skilled, given lower status, underpaid and undervalued (ibid.: 10).

The following are the list of case studies in Mokokchung and Mon District on the economic status of women in rural Nagaland:

*Case study : 2*

Ungma Village, Mokokchung; Dated : 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2014

A woman from Ungma, an Ao village, does all the agricultural work by herself or when there is too much of work, she take along some women labour whose wages are rupees 100 to 200 less than men. This woman is married to a man who is engaged in social organisation. Because most of the time he is busy with the organisation and the husband rarely assist and the house is run by the hard work of the women.

*Case study : 3*

It is reported that a lady working on a project visited the villages in Mon district (Konyaks) in the year 2011 but womenfolk were rarely available as an informant. The reason for this was women go to work in field while husbands are busy with the responsibility assigned by village council or other social obligation. The lady was

asked to come during the off season of the agricultural work if she wanted to collect formation from the women folk.

There is a growing realisation that women particularly rural women have been underestimated and discriminated despite their substantial contribution to the household economy and this perception could be eradicate only through emancipation of women. To empower women the Government of India adopted innovative measures to uplift the status of women particular in rural areas. The Government introduced the Micro Finance through Self-Help Group which is recognised as one of the most promising and effective tools of poverty alleviation and empowering rural women, based on the philosophy of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. The Self-Help Group is a small of poor people having a homogenous social and economic background joining together. The philosophy behind formation of these groups should be self help and peer support to generate economy (Choudhury, 2008: 246). Thus many Self-Help Group has been started in villages across Nagaland engaging women in income generating activities including processing, agricultural produce, raising livestock and marketing of these produced goods. Alongside the Government, there are women organisation that gives appropriate support to the rural women for the active functioning of the Self-Help Group.

Case study conducted in Wokha and Mokokchung:

*Case Study: 4*

A Self-Help Group from Wokha village (the name of the group is not mention on the interest of the group members) conducts sales day to sell the local product that they have produced which includes vegetables and fruits, and also processed food. The group generate good amount of money in every sales day.

*Case Study: 5*

In Mokokchung the Watsu Mungdang, the Apex body of the Ao Women Organization with the permission from the administrative authority, support the Self-Help Group of villages around the district headquarter by inviting them every Wednesday morning to

open stalls at the ground floor of the Mokokchung Municipal Council shopping mall. It give opportunity to the groups to get exposure to the urban market where their goods are being sold more easily than at the sales day conducted in the village.

**6.3.3: Religious Status:** Nagas being an agricultural society, the religious rituals revolves around the agricultural season. All festivals were related to agriculture in which religious rituals and ceremonies are involves. The feast of merit was a feast given to the community to acclaim higher status and agriculture became important for the feast because agriculture produce him most of the requirement of the feast. It is the women who assist her husband producing those requirements. However, the traditions and customs do not provide privileges for women to play prominent role in religion which would help her to acclaim equal status with men. For instance among the Semas, their tradition and customs restricted women from the agricultural rituals. She was even forbidden to do her other handicraft works. Customary laws are not written laws but emerged out of practices and behaviours of the people to behave under certain norms which became their customs that bonded the people and thus attained the status of law. Thus, it was those norms which restrained women to take prominent role in religion. The Naga society is now living in modernity but the attitude of the society toward women, such as the leader of the church is still controlled by the customary laws that expect women to live under the control of men. A case study reports to validate this claim:

*Case study : 6*

A woman by the name Senangchila of Süngratsü was appointed as pastor of Süngratsü village Baptist Church (an Ao Village) as she was found qualified and capable but she could not continue to work for long as there were some obstacles faced by her as well as the church due to her gender. The society could not accept the appointment of a woman as a leader, because according to the customary law and traditional practices women were never appointed as a priest, and appointing a woman as pastor was against customs that the Nagas strictly adheres to. Because of all this reason she could not work for long.

*Case study : 7*

At Aizuto Mission Centre which is the SBAK mission centre under Zunheboto district, the Church strictly adheres to the understanding that God did not give authority to woman or permit a woman to teach as indicated in the book of I Timothy (2: 11-15). They are of the view that since God has given the authority to man, thus women should be submissive as according to the teaching of the Bible. Women also refrain themselves to stand before men fearing that they are going against what is written in Bible and also the customs and traditions of Naga society.

The above case study indicates that customary law and the traditional practices still dominate the church. Khekeyie K. Sema comments that conservative mindset of the people makes the people takes things in a very traditional perspective. Also the feeling of inferiority is in the mindset of women. He further adds that few small physical disabilities may have restrain women from being appointed as pastors<sup>1</sup>.

**6.3.4: Law of Inheritance:** Inheritance plays a major role in patriarchal society where the male take authority over the land and other ancestral property of the family. Under the customary law, descent and inheritance are generally along the male line. The village community land is owned by the village and thus cannot be inherited by any individual, family or clan while clan lands are owned by the male members of the clan. In the case of family land they are inherited by the sons. If there are no male heirs in the family, it passes to the nearest lineage members, and if there is no inheritor in the family circle, then the land goes to the clan and becomes the clan land (Thong & Kath, 2011: 169-170). This description of Thong and Kath clearly depicts that there is no place in Naga customary law for a women to own the right to inherit landed property.

Generally, in Naga society the property of the father is divided equally among the sons (in case of more than one son) but the Angamis leave most of the property to the youngest son, while some group of Konyaks prefer to leave all the property to the eldest (Jacobs, 1990 : 61). Property other than land is not subject to customary restriction except in so far as weapons and ornaments by men always go to male heirs.

Movable property can be inherited by sons and daughters, and no fixed rules (ibid: 61; also see Hutton, 1921a:141-143). The Naga males inherit all property, and they also inherit the father's debts as well (Hutton, 1921b: 160).

It may be noted that though Naga women does not possess the right to inherit ancestral landed properties and other landed properties of the family, the parents can however offer landed property of their own, as a gift particularly at the time of marriage. But this does not mean to suggest her right to inheritance since the land was gifted to her and not as a share of property unlike the way her male siblings who receive them according to the customary practices. A woman may receive immovable properties from her mother and her aunts. Among the Aos, her rights relating to immovable properties cannot be taken away or absorbed by her husband's clan even after her death. If she does not have a daughter, her properties may go to her sister, or her paternal relation (Jamir & Lanunugsang, 2005: 221). Again among the Aos, there is certain property that she inherits from her paternal aunts which cannot be inherited by her own daughter. According to the custom, women inherit traditional ornaments from her paternal aunties upon their death. On the death of a woman, her ornaments will not be inherited by her daughters but is passed on to her father's clan; to her brother's daughters or to her paternal uncle's daughters. On the death of a husband, the widow continues to live in the house, retain the house and all other properties and manage them till her sons attains maturity. However, if she re-marries to a man, she must leave for her new home without having claims to any of the immovable properties.

This traditional ownership of land and the inheritance of property which is still in practice today implicates the status of women in the society. Nagas are agriculturalist and thus land is the major source of economy and the stable economic status is the major factor to acclaim high status in the society. With the arrival of modern education and liberty of women to education, there are many Naga educated working women who contribute to the economy of the family as well as the society. But the denial of ownership of land and inheritance of landed properties on the

contrary makes women inferior to men. Today, every Naga tribe has women organization that works for the welfare of the women. All such organisation supports work alongside the Naga Mothers' Association and Nagaland State Women Commission to attain the statutory rights of women. The Women Associations insist that law of inheritance be equally extended to women, if not the ancestral properties, but properties claimed after marriage both movable and immovable should be equally distributed between the sons and daughters. But the age old tradition of law of inheritance continues to have a strong hold in Naga society.

**6.3.5: Marriage, Divorce and custody of children:** The Nagas follow a very strict tradition and customs when it comes to marriage and divorce. Marriage between the same clan is prohibited. Marriage among the Nagas are exogamous. Customs ordained what could intermarry. Young women marry between the age of 15 to 20 and young men between 20 to 25. Bride - price was not uncommon among the Nagas. It is customary among some Naga tribes that the man pays a bride-price and in return he receives gifts; this gift exchange between the two groups continues. Marriage payments involve exchange of material and ceremonial value. The Semas pay bride-price and at times, the parents of the girl will try to secure the highest possible bride-price, and will insist on marrying their daughter within the chiefly clans. Among the Rengmas, the groom's family present a spearhead to the bride's family as a symbol of tribute between the families (a gift of a spear is a universal Naga symbol of tribute between groups). In case of Lotha bride-price, there are eleven exchanges, each meaning something quite different (Jacobs, 1990 : 57-61). Davis (1891) in his report on the Lothas states that their custom allowed polygamy but was practiced only by the rich. Girls were, as a rule, married off at a young, by 13 or 14 years of age and the pride price were usually about Rs.100. Owing to early marriage, divorce were also very common and widows were allowed to remarry (cited in Elwin, 1969: 351-351). Davis (1891) further notes that among the Angamis, on the day of the marriage, the father of the groom sends some pigs (numbers varies as according to the wealth), salt and some liquor (rice beer) to the bride's parents, by which a feast is given to the bride's friends and the khel men (ibid.: 305-306). Davis report indicates that although

he failed to use the phrase 'bride price', sending materials for the feast clearly shows that the groom's family offered something valuable to the bride's family. Widows and widowers were allowed to remarry, but for that certain rules were to follow. In case of Aos, they were allowed to remarry only after a lapse of one year, if married sooner they were made to pay fine. But some three years must lapse to remarry, if the husband faced an unnatural death or the wife has died in childbirth (Smith, 1925: 56). Though the widow enjoy the right to re-marriage, there are certain norms and laws that is required of her to abide by when she decide for re-marriage.

Divorce was very frequent among the Nagas. When a divorce occurs, it was the law and custom that gave the verdict after studying the matter. For instance, according to the customary law, if a woman among the Angamis is divorced for her infidelity, all her clothes, beads and other belongings were taken by the husband and her family had to repay the expenses made by the husband's family during marriage. If divorced for other reason, and some fault of her own, then she receives one-third of the grains that is there in the house that time. If a woman leaves her husband for no fault on his part, then she had to repay all the expenses of the marriage (Davis, 1969: 307). Likewise, if an Ao woman desert her husband then the husband should report to her parents and if she does not return within a reasonable period of time, he may marry again. But if the woman marries, her first husband may report to the village authority, and if found guilty then her new husband was compelled to pay a fine of a number of pigs. The same verdict was faced by men who were unfaithful (Smith, 1925: 56). There was no place in the society for those who commit the crime of adultery and seduction as they were treated with utmost severity.

According to customary law rights after divorce, the father gets the right over the custody of the children. As the children take the name of the father's clan, they fall into the paternal lineage. The women do not have any rights over the custody of children. In case of a female child, she can go with her mother and stay with the mother as long as she wants but she will always be her father's daughter, which means she cannot change her clan or her lineage. But sons stay with the father. In case

of an infant or minor, the mother will be allowed to take care of the son till he attain a certain age (by when he can do things by himself), and he will return to his father. So it is the mother who nurture and take care of the children but she does not get the rights over her children.

The customs and traditions which the Nagas practiced under certain norms that bind the community together have more of customary bindings on women than her customary privileges. The customs protect the women from being mistreated by her husband's family, because she always has her family and her clan behind her to protect and support her. She does not have to change her clan to her husband's clan even after marriage. But such protection and respect does not justify her status in the society. The socio-economic status of women within the social order is based on rigid patriarchal kinship system. A particular cultural and social norm plays the significant determining role in the development of social attitude towards women. Such customs and tradition have re-enforced gender disparity with the denial of equitable treatment. Hegemony of patriarchal system downgraded the status of women. The customary law and custom has determined the legal framework. In modern state system, the government governs the people with certain legislature and administrative system. But in case of Nagaland, the State Legislative is subject to the customary law. The absence of ultimate decision making power because of the strong presence of customary law result in successfully adopting any policy for the upliftment of the status of Naga women (Khala, 2012: 25-27). The concept of women emancipation has received much attention, and the recognition of women empowerment co-operates for the transformation of idea of greater gender equality in the laws and social justice, protects women and strengthened her rights. But legislation alone cannot achieve social justice, but a pivotal change in the social attitude privately and in public domain is immensely required to bring about changes in perceptions towards women.

## **End Notes**

1 Narrated by Khekiye K. Sema. Retired Commissioner and Secretary at his residence in Kohima on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2012

## CHAPTER-7

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century an influential section of intellectuals, social scientists including social activists, politician and statesmen have been vehemently speaking in terms of female emancipation. Their argument is that women have been subjugated, oppressed and exploited at all ages and at all times throughout the world. An attempt is being made by section of scholars to portray men and women as if they belong to two hostile camps. This type of division is the result of a basic and fundamental mistakes and it has created subsequent thinking on man-woman relationship. There is a basic physical difference between man and woman and in spite of this differences, man and woman have come together and formed a family, paving the way for formation of society and state. Without such understanding and cooperation between man and woman, society would have been impossible (Mao, 2008: 187-188).

Both men and women equally share their contribution to the formation of society; however, men enjoy more privileges than women in the society. This notion has given rise to Feminist movements around the globe. Feminism is concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. Yet there is some debate as to whether the term feminism can be appropriately applied to the thought and activities of earlier women (and men) that explored and challenged the traditional roles of women in the society. Betty Friedan in *The Faminine Mystique* (1963) criticized the idea that women could find the fulfilment through childbearing and homemaking. Friedan hypothesized that women are victims of false belief system that requires them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Her book played an important role in encouraging women to question traditional female role and seek self-fulfilment. On one spectrum is a radical feminist such as Mary Daly (1978) who in her work *Gyn/Ecology: Metaethics of Radical Feminism* argues that society would benefit if there were dramatically fewer men. On the other, feminists

like Christiana Hoff Sommers (1996) consider herself as feminist but accuses the movement of anti-male prejudice in her famous work *Who Stole Feminism? How Women have Betrayed Women*. Some feminist like Katha Pollitt (1995), the author of *Reasonable Creatures* considers feminism to hold simply that 'women are people' and views as separate sexes rather than unite them to be sexiest and not feminist. Carol Gilligan (1990) *In Different Voices* believes that there are important differences between the sexes which may or may not be inherent, but which cannot be ignored. But there are others who believe that there are no essential differences between the sexes, and that their social roles are due to conditioning, while individualist feminist like Wendy McElroy (2002) who wrote *Liberty for Women* are concerned with equality of rights and criticize sexist/classist form of feminism as 'gender feminism'.

The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of feminist theology, as part of the natural outworking of the feminist movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* was published in 1895 and 1898. Just as equal rights for women were demanded in terms of education, employment and the law; so also were equal rights sought in the Church. Sharon James in her paper on *An overview of Feminist theology* points out that the starting point of feminist theology is women's experience, and the rejection of 'patriarchy' (the structure of society whereby men rule women). Women, it is argued, will only become truly human, with the ending of patriarchy. The feminist says that Christianity was androcentric and patriarchal. There is a huge range among feminist theologians. Some see themselves as within the orthodox Christian tradition. They regard themselves as continuing a prophetic tradition of calling believers back to authentic religion (in this case a renunciation of sexism). Others view the Christian tradition as so hopelessly compromised that the only solution is an exodus out of patriarchal religion to the older 'goddess' tradition of pre-Jewish/Christian paganism, while the religious Liberalist points out treatment of women by Jesus as equals. On the other hand, Conservatives maintains that the position of power are to be given to men, and women should not permit to teach or to have authority over a man, deacons must be men and women must be silent submissive when in the Church<sup>1</sup>. To some, the word 'Feminism' represents liberation

and long-awaited justice; to others, divisiveness. Emotions have run feverishly high in the debate over women's rights, and the past few decades have seen the debate move into the theological mainstream<sup>2</sup>. Historically, the first widely publicized book on the role of women in the church that hinted at the formulation of a specific feminist theology was published in 1968: *The Church and the Second Sex*, by Mary Daly. Following the publication of this book, the market was virtually flooded with books and articles on feminist theology, all of which challenged the idea that female subordination was ordained by God.

The issue of gender inequality is the most serious issue around the globe. In most times, people talk about economic and political rights. But the International Women Year, 1975 raised unexpected reactions in the Church, which awakened interest in the Church to find a solution to problems concerning the status of women in the Church.

What is noticed from the present research is the strong implication of growing disparity for women as compared to men in Naga society since the early period. It is the customs and traditions that have created social order based on a rigid patriarchal kinship. In the present study, what is observed is the role of women in public life, her denial to participate in decision-making and rules of inheritance that has a great impact on her role in religious spheres. The traditions and customs have a strong binding on the society even at present.

Xavier P. Mao (2008) in his paper *Man versus Woman: A critique of emancipative Ideology* put forward his argument on the subjugation of women, stating that as historical and evolutionary fact, man became the head of the family with power to control decision making procedure and it was not out of any deliberate design to subjugate woman. He also adds that denial of property right to woman could be explained by the fact that agriculture and subsequent land being the primary and only source of livelihood at certain stage compelled society not to grant the right on land to women for the simple reason that such a practice will create insoluble problems (Mao, 2008 : 189-190). However, the data from the present research

indicates that women in traditional Naga society have been debarred from participating in decision making and the trend is still persisting in the society. The denial of inclusion of women in decision making subjugate women and this could be supported by what Aier (1998) in her work *Women in Ao Society* remarks on how members in the village Council in Ao villages are selected. Any legitimate citizen of certain age-group, irrespective of wealth and rank has the right to be a member of the Village Council. The term “legitimate citizen” is inclined only to male members, because only male members could be the representatives of their clan to the Council. Women are also not regarded as a member of the Village Citizen Forum because membership fee of the forum is collected only amongst male members. Women are disallowed from participation or even to attend any public meeting where important affairs of the village are discussed. Aside subjugation, women are also not even regarded as legitimate citizen of the village. Such is a common practice in all Naga villages.

Similar attitude towards women is not prevalent only in village administration but also in State politics. Table 1 clearly indicates that till date, there is not a single woman that is elected as a State Legislature though there are some who contested. This is because, despite the fact that female voters vote in large numbers as indicated in Table 2, female voters in particular and the voters in general are not voting in favour of the women candidates, while it is clear that the law makers and the decision making body are voted on the strength of women vote. Thus, women play a decisive role in giving the power to men to make decision. If only the female voters vote for the women candidates, then there would be women member in the decision-making body. It is not only men folks that deny women her rights and status but paradoxically, women themselves debar from being the part of the law makers. In this context, women need to be made aware that by using their voting strength, one can elect a woman to the decision-making body. In turn, this would not only equalize her status with men in the field of decision-making but with a woman member in the house, women issues will be taken up more seriously. In addition, Amer (2012) remarks that women preconceived notions of gender role stereotypes influence their

voting choice. In Naga society, gender role stereotype is still prevalent, where women and men are expected by tradition to play different roles. In Naga society, the norms and attitude regarding a women's role in society is traditional. As women are socialized in terms of their gender roles in society, they become more or less conscious of their role in the public political arena. Leadership role is still conceptualized as a preserve of men and women's role is largely deemed to be in the household. Such a tradition and cultural learning, partly explains why women perceive women candidates as less qualified than men to run public office, leading women voters to vote for male candidates. She therefore points out that Naga women's success in decision-making body (election) depends not so much on the electorate at large, but on how society as a whole perceives women in public political arena (Amer, 2012: 100).

Economy is one of the prime factors behind the social standing of a human being. But women lack this power (Bhattacharya, 2012: 93). In tribal society or in most of the rural areas, agriculture is the main occupation of subsistence and thus ownership of land and right to landed property is one of the prominent factors that determined their status in the society. This is one of the major reasons why women in Naga society could not acclaim equal status with men because she does not possess rights to inherit property as according to the customary law. According to the Rural Development Institute (RDI) Report on the Women's Inheritance Rights to land and property in South Asia, women in developing country rarely holds secure rights to land, which can provide physical safety and psychological security. Land can be a source of food and a base for income-generating activities. Land rights elevate the status of the rights holder in the eyes of the family and the community. Land rights create a sense of self-worth and give people options (RDI Report, 2009: 3) Land is a critical asset in most developing countries, especially for the poor. Most of the rural poor rely on subsistence agriculture for their survival. Furthermore, customary and formal rights to law act both as a form of economic access to nonmarket institutions, such as the household and the community-level governance structure. Land ownership confers economic benefits as an input into agricultural production, as a source of

income from rental or sale, and as collateral for credit that can be used for either consumption or investment purposes (ibid.: 5). The study report claims that in South Asia, land is the most valued form of property, conveying economic, political, and symbolic significance and the inheritance is as according to their inheritance law, the source and the jurisdiction.

Thus sharing a common system of importance of land does not indicate that they would share the same law. Though all regions have a customary law, it would be as according to their customs and traditions. Like in Pakistan as according to *Shariat* (Muslim Personal Law Application) Act of 1962 and as per the Islam law, women (as wives or daughters) receive half as much as their male counterparts. But inheritance of agricultural land is decided by personal law of the citizen as per the customary law which is according to their custom. In India, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 provides women a provision, as widow, daughter, and mother to receive share from the property. The Christian community of India does not come under the jurisdiction of this Act of 1956 but their law of succession falls under the Indian Succession Act, 1925 (portion), which was borrowed from the *English Common Law*, which is the widow receives one third and sons and daughters divide the two thirds among themselves (for a more thorough discussion, see RDI Report, 2009). The Nagas who are Christians, however do not fall under this Act of 1925, but their succession of property is adopted as according to their customary law because the Constitution of India has given a special provision under Article 371A for the Nagas to preserve their tribal customs. Therefore, when other Christian women in India (with exceptions) gets the provision to inherit properties as according to the law, Naga women do not earn the right to inherit landed property.

The denial of rights to landed property to women in Naga society as according to Mao (2008) is to avoid any insoluble problems. However, this is not a valid reason for not granting the rights to women over land because there are societies among tribals that follow a matrilineal system where women hold the rights over land. For instance, among the Khasis of Meghalaya, women by customary law inherit landed

property. On the contrary, the Naga society being a patriarchal society with their clan and village exogamy rules of marriage, men do not want women any rights on land due to the rights over landed property that might lose to other clans or village. In addition, land being the only asset of economic subsistence as Nagas was (are) agriculturist, granting of rights over landed property to women would means uplift in her economic status. This might risk raising the status of women in the society at par with men because it is the economic status that largely determines the status of a person.

In a patriarchal society like the Naga society, the role played by women has always been undermined. Traditionally, Nagas has been practicing the culture that it was the duty of the men to protect the family and do all the hard work in the field, and go to warfare, whereas the duty of the women was to look after the children, nurture them, do the household work, and assist her husband in the field. In religious sacrifices and rituals, she was to only assist her husband. A woman could never become a member of the Village Council. With no written laws and written constitution, the entire prominent role in the society has been played by men folk based on customary laws. Was it because of her femininity and her inferior physical strength that such customs made her incapable of any prominent role? But in the present research, inferiority of physical strength did not appear very prominent as a reason for women to have inferior status because women were hard working, caters to all the household work and also does most of the work in the field. Even as according to the studies of the United Nations in rural areas of developing countries, women perform an average of 20 percent more work than men or an additional 102 minutes per day. In the past, the Nagas for one reason or the other had frequent conflict between inter-villages of the tribes. Thus most of the time, the men of the family were engaged in wars or raids and a trophy of an enemy head received highest status in the society, so a man as a warrior did not get time to do much work for the family. It was the women who contributed substantially more in sustaining the family. Thus, questioning the physical inferiority of women is inappropriate and erroneous. Women are not regarded at par with men though she seems to contribute and take a pivotal

role in the society, assisting men and at times resting the burdens on her to run the family.

The role of women in all social activities determines her role in religion. Naga society is a patriarchal society, and the role assigned to women as a mother, a wife and a daughter to care for the household chores signifies that she would not only be debarred from being a member of the village council and disallow claims to rights over landed properties but she is also not allowed to perform any prominent role in religious spheres. In the traditional religious beliefs and practices, women were not allowed to be the priest of the village. It was the priest who performs all the community rituals and in any rituals related to the family, the priest is invited to perform, or the father being the head of the family performs the rituals. Women also played certain roles in rituals as it was she who made all preparations for the rituals. However, the roles assigned to her do not place her in the same position as men in the ritual arenas. In the Ao society, the only women who performed the family related ritual were the widows. Women were also prohibited to be a part of some important community rituals as it is the case with the Angamis. Although women perform some sacred rituals like the *Kizie*, a dedication of new house; *Mekhur Zie*, an annual ceremony in remembrance of the dead; *Tsiakrii*, starting of work in the field; *Liede*, starting of harvest, and *Ki Kenyü*, sanctification of harvest, when it comes to the most popular Angami festival *Sekrenyie* which is a feast for purification, women were not even allowed to fetch water from the spring or other sources due to fear of defilement on the day of the ritual called *pru*. Even the meals they cooked were not taken by men and were prohibited to go near men or to walk past them. Also there was female shaman called *Themumiapfu* who were believed to have helped in curing diseases by consulting the spirits but she could not become a *Zhevo*, a chief traditional religious practitioner as according to *Nanyu* (Angami traditional religion). Among the Aos, aside performing rituals, women and children were refrained from entering the village common altar. Also due to fear and superstition, women and children themselves would not frequent such sacred places. Nagas are agriculturist and all the rituals and ceremonies revolve round agricultural cycles. The Sema women despite being the

most productive in agriculture occupation were isolated from agricultural ceremonies. The first ritual of Sema agricultural year is *Asuyekiphe* in which men perform grand ceremonies on their new field, and *Luwani*, on the completion of clearing the field. Followed by the next ritual called *Vesuvelo* that takes place after the field is burnt and ready for sowing. Besides such rituals, there are other minor rituals that are performed till the harvest where women were not allowed to participate. Women were also prohibited to engage in her daily activities like husking of paddy, spinning, weaving, and sewing a string of beads during the time of rituals as it is believed that such activities may have ill-effects on the paddy. There is also a certain ritual called *Aphikimithe* (chaste) ritual which transforms a private ritual to public performed by men for the compliance of chastity.

The norms, traditions and customs that the Nagas followed nowhere indicate that women in Naga society are highly respected as it is generally maintained by almost every Naga. If this is so, why are women debarred from participating in most of the important rituals? In the ritual spheres, prohibition of women to approach the common altar of the village and isolating her from most agricultural ceremonies designate that women are made to feel inferior. Women undertakes all necessary preparation for any rituals; her assistance and support were required while special privileges like offering of prayers and performing the main rituals were roles assigned to men. In the case of the Angamis, it is taboo to even walk past men on the day of sacred ritual during the feast of purification. What is the extreme nature of this practice? Is it because of her menstruation that a woman is perceived as “impure”? By refraining from associating during such sacred rituals of purification, it implies that her participation would contaminate the essence of the rituals because impurity implies ruining of uncontaminated nature of something. A person is being accused of impurity when his/her nature has been spoiled in some way by sin. According to Fr. Sergie Sveshnikov on *Ritual Impurity* (2009), it would be incorrect to focus on only women being subject to the rules of ritual impurities. A bleeding male would also be asked to abstain from entering a Church, unless the flow of blood was stopped. The notion of ritual impurity in the Orthodox Church is much broader than menstruating

women and also applies to some aspects of male physiology, as well as to some non-gender-specific situations. Also Kristin De Troyer; Judith A. Hubert; Judith Ann Johnson and Ann-Marie Korte has taken a broad interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between the female blood and issue of purity and impurity in their edited book *Wholly Women, Holy Blood: A feminist Critiques of Purity and Impurity* (2003). Working with different texts ranging from the historical critical to postmodern where blood is a threat to holiness or a step towards holiness, they also explores the shedding of blood as the sanctifying rite of heroes. Therefore it would be inappropriate to term women as “impure” simply because of her menstruation cycle as this describes solely in terms of her physical affliction, a flow of blood that identify her as haemorrhaging women and not impure women. It can be assumed that menstruation cannot be a reason as this does not occur to women because of any criminal or evil act but part of her physiological nature. However according to Philip (2006), menstruation and childbirth are universal female events that have several common characteristics. Both of them are physical events, which occur in the female reproductive organs which express women’s fertility and appear only during the fertile years of a woman and their impact is not only physiological, since both of them carry cultural and social meanings that influence the relations between women and men and the evaluations of women and their roles in society and in religion (Philip, 2006: 1). She tries to examine the menstruation and childbirth in biblical context, as the fertility and the impurity of blood from the womb are intertwined in the biblical concepts. In order to understand the cultural, social and religious concepts of women, their bodies, and their fluids she adopted certain concepts like philological-historical approach, feminist biblical interpretation, comparison to ancient Near Eastern sources, and anthropological sources. She further maintains that in many cultures, the menstrual blood is regarded as impure, and each culture has its set of rules that help it to properly deal with this impurity. The article on *Menstrual Taboos among Major Religion* by Guterman, Metha and Gibbs (2007) provides an overview of the views of menstruating women held by five of the world's major religions. Certain striking similarities were found among this major religion regarding their beliefs about menstruation as similar taboos

exist across religion and culture. Some of the more consistent themes include isolation, exclusion from religious services, and restraint from sexual intercourse. Every major religion views the menstruating woman as impure, despite the fact that there is nothing inherently impure about the process. Some religions view the impurity as strictly spiritual; others fear physical danger and harm as well. One of the differences between the major religions is the level of severity of the menstrual taboos. Buddhism and Christianity offer the most lenient view of the menstruating woman, while Orthodox Judaism has the strictest view. Furthermore, the views of the menstruating women are specific to the orientation of the culture from which the religion arises (for a detailed discussion, see Guterman, Metha and Gibbs, 2007). On the menstruation and childbirth in the Classical Biblical Research, impurity has been greatly emphasized while fertility has been neglected. Thus due to emphasize on impurity, menstruation and childbirth are closely related in the book of Leviticus. However the commentators on Leviticus written in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflect the culture and social convention of the period, that is, not to discuss women's intimate fluids in public because it reveals a great uneasiness when dealing with women's impurity law. The evolution theory had great influence on the European thought in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century and therefore, some commentators adopted the basic evolution claim that humanity progress from primitive stages towards the more developed stages. Hence the impurity in their opinion is believed to be a central part in the primitive stages of religion, while impurity become a moral and spiritual concept and had nothing to do with impure fluids as the religion progressed. Thus impurity of blood from the womb were explained as remains of old superstitions. From 1970s, a new interest in Leviticus arose and many new commentaries were published. In many of them, the impact of new anthropological approaches and of feminists biblical interpretation is felt, and new information on purity and impurity from fragments of *Qamran* is represented. A book by anthropologist Mary Douglas *Leviticus at Literature* (1999) offers a new way to understand the literary structure of the book of Leviticus.

The impurity of blood from the womb is emphasized in priestly writings, but there is no explanation on the origin and reasons of impurity. Therefore comparison study of the biblical text to ancient Near Eastern sources and to anthropological and sociological concepts of impurity has been done by scholars to solve the problem. Luzato (1871) claims that all the bodily impurities like skin disease, unhealthy discharge of men and women, menstruation are connected to death and this is not the reason for their impurity (cited in Philip, 2006: 4). Dillman (1879) supports the interpretation of Luzato and put forth that impurity is a sin against God, and since fertility is a positive concept in the Bible, impurity of semen and blood from the womb could not be explained as sin (cited in Philip, 2006: 4). However, Klee (1998) rejected the assumed relationship between death and blood as blood is connected to the creation of new life and emphasize on this connection as the origin of the belief on the impurity of the blood from the womb (cited in Philip, 2006: 4). Kauffmann (1977) evaluates the Israelite impurity beliefs as an inheritance of Near Eastern beliefs. However the impurity in the Near East was seen as independent force that was a danger to gods and people while in Israel, it was merely a situation caused by human physiology. Impurity was regarded as a sickness, and removing the impurity cures the sickness in ancient Near East. On the other hand, the aim of Israelite impurity laws was to separate between the holy and the impure (as cited in Philip, 2006: 4). Contrary to the biblical research, anthropologist like Robertson Smith (1914) established some basic concepts on impurity claiming that impurity belongs to the magic thought, a level of thought below religious thought. He tried to explain this by referring to Polynesian idiom *taboo* in the meaning of something severely forbidden and prohibition based on *taboo* are irrational and reflect fear of the *tabooed* object or person. Frazer (1955) characterised the magical thought as primitive and argues that magical thought is the blurred impression of the differences between holy and the impure as both are tabooed. Since both of them were white Western Christian, living during colonial times, they evaluated the beliefs of the primitives from the point of view of the civilized people. The evolutionist claims that the adoption of Polynesian idiom *taboo* as a negative concept by Smith reflected to his own negative attitude

towards menstruation and the general acceptance of this connection certainly proves the negative attitude towards them in Western culture.

Buckly and Gottlieb (1988) claim that the impurity rules are based on *taboo* became popular in early anthropologist and biblical research. The evolutionists believed that the primitive world was uniform, and the impurity beliefs also regarded as universal. Buckly and Gottlieb (1988) points to another anthropological approach according to which, impurity carries symbolic meanings basing on Durkheim's (1982) study on social functions of religious symbols and on Mauss's (1979) studies on the symbolic meaning of the body. Mary Douglas (1966) adopted Mauss's claim of the body as a symbolic mirror of society and argues that the main function of impurity rules is to secure the society's wholeness. The body limits represent the society's limits and thus the bodily fluids threaten its wholeness. The function of purity is to guard and to secure the wholeness. To her, impurity is also something dirty and not in its right place. She further maintains that each society has its unique impurity beliefs which are a key to understanding its character.

Talking about the impact of menstruation on impurity in tribal religion Guterman, Metha and Gibbs (2007) presents many different tribal societies on how religion incorporated taboos around the menstrual process. Menstrual huts and other taboos were common among primitive cultures in the past. The Huaulu of Indonesia, for instance, have a menstrual hut on the edge of village. While Huaulu women must live in these huts during menstruation, they are not confined to them – they can wander through the forest, if they stay away from hunting trails. These rituals are performed to spare the men from harm. The Dogon (a group of people living in the central plateau region of Mali, south of the Niger bend near the city of Bandiagara in the Mopti region) believe that women must stay in a special hut during the course of their menstrual period. During menstruation, Dogon women get no relief from their usual agricultural labour and spend most of their days working in the fields. However, village streets and family compounds are off-limits. Furthermore, sexual intercourse and cooking for a husband are strictly forbidden. In the cultures of the Highlands of

Papua New Guinea (i.e., the Hagen, Duna, and Pangia areas), menstrual huts were once the norm. However, these groups have now abolished the practice of using these huts, along with other ritual practices. The Enga, Kaulong, and Sengseng cultures of New Guinea believe that sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman will drain and weaken a man.

Such beliefs and practices are not observed among the Nagas, though there is certain degree of perception that a period of menstruation is regarded unclean. In Naga traditional beliefs, women were refrained from rituals not because of her menstruation but because a particular ritual prohibits the participation of women. Thus even though women were regarded as unclean during her menstruation, this was not a reason to restrict her from participation but because of certain traditional norms that binds women to act and follow according to the customs. Therefore, based on all the arguments outlined above the present study fails to identify any conclusive reasons why Naga women are abstained from participating in any important rituals.

By the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new religion was brought to Naga people by the American missionaries, the practices of which were very different from their traditional beliefs. This new religion, Christianity, taught about equality of all humans big or small, men or women. And by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was tremendous growth of Churches and modern education in Nagaland. But along with the growth of modern education and the churches whether the mindset of the people has changed, is a big question. In the religion which teaches about equality of mankind, the Church still does not permit women to be a pastor. The Church has a different department for women in which an associate women pastor/women leader is appointed as leader of the women department, while men form the main administrative body of the Church, the pastor and the deacons, who undertakes all decisions. This may be because of the notion that Naga women are protected. That she is protected by her father when she is young, by her husband when she is married, and by her sons when she is old. Protection is given only to people who are unable to protect themselves. When a protection is provided, there is less freedom. Judith Butler

and Zeynep Gambette (2013) maintains there is always something both risky and true in claiming that women are especially vulnerable. The claim can be taken to mean that women have an unchanging and defining vulnerability, and that kind of argument makes the case for paternalistic protection. If women are especially vulnerable, then they seek protection, and it becomes the responsibility of the state or other paternal powers to provide that protection.

Thus the argument put forth is that Naga women have less freedom because she is protected which indicate that men have authority over women. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider as inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. On the other hand, Liberal feminist like Mackenzie and Stoljar (1999) suggests that women should enjoy personal autonomy saying they are entitled to a broad range of autonomy-enabling conditions (cited in Liberalism Feminism, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 30<sup>th</sup> sept, 2013). Women in traditional Naga society are said to have been confined to household activities, terming that it is the duty of a woman to look after the children and the household chores, whereas men should engage in all the hard work outside of the house. But women in traditional Naga society apart from taking care of all the household activities assisted her husband in the field. At times, it is the woman who does most of the work in the agricultural fields. Thus according to the Socialist feminists, unequal standing in both the workplace and domestic sphere holds women down and see that women are exploited by a patriarchal system that devalues women and the substantial work they do.

The customary law which is an age old practice controls the Naga society. This customary law is protected by Article 371A of the Indian Constitution, and still have a very stronghold on the modern Naga society. An in-depth examination of Naga customary law suggest that there are more norms for women than men. The custom that was designed to protect her has more bindings on her than men. From the present research, what is evident is that beginning the inception of Christianity among the Nagas, women played a significant role for the spread and growth of the Church but

when it comes to the question or discussion of appointing women as a leader of the Church, the society is restrained to accommodate women leadership in the Church. The coming of Christianity which introduced western education alongside has taken the Naga society to greater heights that conversely had strong effects on the Naga culture. Women who were confined to their household activities in traditional society began to participate more actively in the society. Many educated Naga women hold high post in different government and non-governmental organization (sometimes even holding superior office than men) which has improved the current women status in the society. The new religion (Christianity), however, could not elevate the position of women in religion. Opportunities continues to be denied to women not because they are unqualified or incapable of but because of the stereotype traditional attitudes and perceptions towards the appropriated role of women. Also the other reason for not appointing women as leaders in the Church is because the people who appoint them are all men. Generally, it is the male chauvinism of Naga men that denies the appointment of a woman as their leader due to the superiority complex that Naga men continues to hold as part of the age old patriarchal system. However in certain exceptional cases, as drawn from the case study (case study 7) among the Semas, particularly at Aizuto Mission Centre, it is evident that though women are found eligible to perform as pastors, it is the women themselves who restrains from taking such positions fearing to go against the Biblical tradition of the Old Testament.

There is also a debate on whether women should be assigned more significant role in the Church. Conservatives around the world strongly stands to the Biblical view that Jesus chose men to carry on the Faith as apostles and thus when a priest is at the altar, he is believed to symbolically represent Jesus, who himself is a man. This view is supported by case studies conducted at Mokokchung and Aizuto Mission Centre (case study 6 and 7) reflecting how the Naga society opposes the appointment of women as pastors and how women themselves refrain from taking such role of leadership in the Church. On the other hand, the Liberals supports the equality of role in the Church between men and women, and suggests that so far a person can lead a Church, it matters less what gender they belong, and in Jesus times, society was much

different from the present. Today, feminism and liberalism goes extreme on the Biblical limitation of gender roles in the Church thus causing damage to the Christian doctrine; along with them are the majority of the Church group who ignores the place of women in the Church. Women thus have the same privilege as that of men, but in practical aspects, women are in a way limited to privileges of the authority in the Church which is a common Biblical teaching according to the Old Testament.

Contextualizing the situation to Nagaland, in order to uplift the status of women in the society at par with men, the traditional perceptions and attitudes towards women needs a drastic change and transformation. This problem is not only persistent in Naga society but feminists across the world has argued and debated on how to eliminate this issue. Radical feminists maintains that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality; and as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to reform in any significant way. Socialist feminists also see women being exploited by a patriarchal system. The post-structural feminists also share the same voice arguing that equality is still defined from the masculine or patriarchal perspective. Postcolonial feminists also challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. While the Postmodern argues that gender is constructed through language and that there is no single cause for women's subordination and no single approach towards dealing with the issue, liberal feminism which is an individualistic form of feminism holds a different view. According to them, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of the society.

According to the study, there are several factors that play a pivotal role in influencing the uplift of the role of women in religion in particular, and the status of women in the society in general. In Nagaland, the Emancipation of Women Empowerment has also received much attention; however, this is a task that cannot be achieved only through legislative means but the changes in perceptions and attitudes which is considered most important. Women empowerment presupposes a drastic

change in the perceptions and expectations from women in the society. Empowerment initiates struggle, learning to deal with forces of oppression and entails consciousness to enhance the quality of life. Empowerment is a process to gain the ability to make independent choices over their achievements, become self-reliant and overcome subordination. As part of Women Empowerment, the Government of India has introduced a Micro Finance through Self-Help Group, which is a promising and effective tool for poverty alleviation and empowering rural women. Self-Help Group is a small group of poor people having a uniform social and economic background. This Self-Help Group are generating the economy of the community by organising sales days where they sell the local products. Initiatives are sometimes taken by women organization as indicated in case study conducted in Wokha and Mokokchung (case study 4 and 5) for active and continuous functioning of the Self-Help Group.

Education is another element as literate and educated people are more ready to accept the changes in the society as socially-conscious and literate society plays a vital role. The research reveals that due to introduction of modern education, there are many educated Naga women who holds high positions in offices, thus uplifting the status of women. But this is a case observed only among the women in urban areas, while in rural areas the traditional mindset of the people still persists. Despite of this traditional mindset there is some certain progress and as has been observed by the investigator during the field trip that the enrolment of the girl child in school in rural areas are improving. This is also evident from the report on the *Impact of Communitisation of Schools through Women Participation on Girls' Elementary Education in Nagaland* (2013). However more awareness programme should be conducted for both the children and the parents on the importance of education for both boys and girls.

Media is another means that plays a crucial role in moulding values in the society. The media image have a stronger impact on shaping gender images and have a power to change society's attitude. The Constitution of India provides freedom of expression to every citizen. Media is one of the platforms where one can express

one's personal opinions. When the Parliament of India has passed the Bill on Women reservation, it contradicted with the Naga Customary Law which is protected by the Constitution under Article 371A. Many views and opinions were expressed in print media as to why women reservation is not relevant in Naga society. An article by an advocate Zhekheli Zhimomi on *Article 371A versus Women Reservation?* (Nagaland Post, 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2010) and a Rejoinder by Z.K Pahrü, BTC, Pfutsero on T.L. Angami's article *Naga Customary Law and 33% Reservation for Women* (Nagaland Post, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2010) speak volumes on the role of media that plays in disseminating awareness to the general public on issues concerning the uplift of women's status in Naga Society. However, sometimes the media focus on only those that attract the attention of the readers and viewers. For instance as to what Arijit Sen has portrayed on Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: Reuters Institute Fellowship Paper on the topic *Marginal on the Map: Hidden Wars and Hidden Media in NorthEast India* (2011: 20-22) that on the afternoon of July 15, 2004, 12 women disrobed themselves and stood naked in front of the Indian paramilitary headquarters in Imphal protesting the rape and murder of Manorama, a 32 year old Manipuri woman by paramilitary forces. Gruesome as that incident was, and as widespread as the anger of the people was, the national media did not report. It was only after the protest by the *Imas* or Mothers of Manipur and the publication of photographs of their protest in some newspaper that the rest of the mainstream media woke up. Reporters were sent to Imphal, stories were carried and awards won. But unfortunately the main demand of the protest, the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, fell on deaf ears. Manipur again was dropped off the national mainstream news circle. Again in December, 2008, this same group of 12 women travelled to Delhi and staged a sit-in-protest in New Delhi but the media did not find that protest as noteworthy. Thus the focus of the media were rather on their nudity than the sufferings and pains for which the rally was staged.

The customary law which is the highest authority in Naga society denies inheritance to women and participation of women in the decision-making body as a result of which the role of women is undermined in all other social aspects. However,

customary laws by its true nature are dynamic and never static. Given the changing scenario of Naga society in the present, such customary laws should be able to accommodate the privileges deemed to Naga women according to the changing dynamics of the society. As in the case of (as in case study 6) appointment of women pastor in Sangratsü, an Ao village, had there been no opposition and wide acceptance by the society, then this trend of appointing women as Church leader would have continued.

The study reveals that the traditional customs and practices still continues to dominate the modern Christian churches in Nagaland and the mindset and attitudes of the society towards women is still deeply rooted in the traditional patriarchal system. The new faith has taken over the old beliefs and the Nagas now follow the new Christian doctrine and teachings. Christianity, a popular religion which teaches about equality of all mankind is yet to achieve what it preaches, particularly across churches in Nagaland. Such equity can only be achieved if some of the age old traditional customs and practices that are inapplicable and irrelevant in the present modern Naga society be replaced by integrating a more prominent role of women. The UN-decade forum of 1976-86 brought out in 1985 acknowledge and recognises that knowledge about religious teachings is necessary for promoting the participation of women in decision-making and recognizing their significant roles and contribution to public life. On the contrary, in the Naga context, it is the social attitude that attributes the role of women in religion. Henceforth, a role equal to both genders must be fairly assigned according to their capabilities and abilities irrespective of gender-bias as both women and men equally contribute to the welfare and progress of a society.

The present research is limited within the domain of religion vis-a-vis its gender roles, particularly the contest and the need for negotiations on the participation of women in traditional rituals and Christianity, which has brought about changes to the old practices alongside other major religions. An extensive study on Naga customary law to understand on how such restriction were imposed on women was also conducted. However, as the present investigation is focused entirely on religion,

the study failed to provide due attention on the role of women in administration and decision-makings; her roles in the economic life regulating the family and society and sectors of modern education. Out of the sixteen officially declared Naga tribes, the case discussed in the present research is also limited to few major tribes. With the broad limitations outlined, future research in the region might focus on issues concerning the nature of status of women in modern Naga society, particularly on the role that women plays in modern Naga society in the field of governance of the State, her contribution to the socio-economic development and also on her role in modern education despite the stronghold of the society's customary law. Given the rich repository of the place of women in Naga folklore albeit a patriarchal set up, special attention must be paid to the representation of women in Naga oral tradition and reinterpreting such sources in the light of her role in the community and society today. The *Indian Folklife* series *From Antiquity to Modern Naga Folklore* (2009) reflects upon the relevance of such an approach. The paper by Lucy Zehol (2009) *Remembering Naga Heroes/Heroines of the Legendary Khezhakeno village of Nagaland* in the same series where it discusses on the representation of the ideal Man and Woman contained in Naga folklore during pre-colonial times is a step towards sensitizing and rethinking the role of women in modern Naga society.

## End Notes

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