

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study has explored the theme of change and continuity in Angami indigenous religion focusing on the phenomenon of religious conflict, religious conversion and adaptation. It has been argued that any study on religious change requires an in-depth detail account of the religious belief to acquire a better grasp of its changing nature. The study has further elaborated on the various contentious issues which emerged between the adherents of *Krüna* and Christians. It also examined how the two religions manoeuvre and negotiate their differences for a continual coexistence. The study revealed that the phenomenon of conversion among the Angami is not as simple as is often made to appear in many academic writings but that it has a strong connection with *Krüna* practices revealing the complex and meticulous nature of *Krüna*. And this was elaborated and supported with the narratives of the late/last converts. The study also addresses how the adherents of *Krüna* are adapting with the challenges in the contemporary times and in the process asserting a distinct religion identity.

The major themes of this study have been arranged into six separate chapters. The study began by laying out the research problem, locating the Angami Nagas, theoretical framework, literature review, research objectives, methodology and research guide.

The study problematised the concept of religion and its usage in a non-Western context. The study then located and defined Angami indigenous religion within the discourses of Indigenous religion after which a working definition of indigenous religion was provided. The study also highlighted the colonial representation of Naga religious belief where the Nagas were projected as bereft of any religion hence capable of receiving religion from the missionaries. With this given definition and background study, the study provided an in-depth detail account of the religious belief and practices of the Angami to get an understanding on what exactly is religion for the Angami. The belief in the existence of *terhuomia* (supernatural being) occupies a central position in the Angami religion which gets reflected in their ritual practices in times of sickness, to ward off natural calamities, agricultural related rituals, their beliefs in life after death and existence of soul and spirit. The Angami believe in the all good divine Supreme Being called *Ukepenuopfi*, which comes under the rubric of *terhuomia*. And this belief in Supreme Being according to

Longvah (2017) in her critique of colonial classification of Nagas as ‘animists’, said Nagas cannot be considered as ‘animists’. The religious life is not confined with the belief in supernatural being but also persisted in their social cultural life and social structure of the community.

A notable feature of the Angami religious belief is the manifestation of the village as a ritual unit. The Angami do not practice their religion as a tribe but as a village, *khel*, and clan. The allocation of religious specialist and the ritual disposition are always associated with their respective clan, *khel* or village, hence a meaningful religious life is derived when their religion is practiced as a community. The position of the religious specialists – *Kemevo* (village priest), *tsiakro-u* (first sower), *liedepfü* (first reaper), *kiso-pithi* (the caretaker of village gate) and *livau* (the person who initiate the burial rites) cannot be allocated to any random clan but in each village, a particular clan or lineage is assign to hold the position which highlight the significance of such clan but at the same time reaffirm and ensure the peaceful cooperation among the clans. The village gate as a sacred symbol plays a crucial role and the initiation of every ritual is always in align with the village gate. The reckoning of time determined by human activities which is associated with the celebration of festival and agricultural cycle also differs from village to village hence, every village ‘year’ and ‘time’ is different. Therefore, the study reveals that Angami indigenous religion is a community-based religion where a meaningful religious life is acquired when the religion is followed as a community and at the same time the well-being and unity of the village, *khel* and clan gets reasserted in times of the observation of rites and rituals.

The intervention of Christianity disrupted and threatened the very base of the Angami religious life, i.e., the unity of the village. The village was divided into the Christians and non-Christians. The newly converts begin to dissociate themselves from *Krüna* practices and customs. Taking part in festivals, community feasts, ceremonial rites and drinking rice beer were considered ‘unchristian’ and ‘heathen’. The newly converts also breached the *genna* principles in times of village *genna* and unmarried women began growing their hair. All these actions offended the adherents of *Krüna* and created much dissension because they belief that the actions of the newly converts have undermined the well-being and sanctity of the village. In such situation, the colonial court plays a crucial role in their attempt to keep the village in one entity. For which the *Krüna* adherents were made to

categorise the yearly *genna* into 'significant' and 'less significant' with the aim to make the Christian follows at least the 'significant *genna*'. This numbering of *genna* has rationalised and disenchanting the charismatic nature of *genna*. But on the other hand, this numbering of *genna* appears to be a way for the *Krüna* adherent to hold their world together.

The hostile attitude of the two religions has not remain the same in the present time. However, they continue to negotiate their differences for a continual coexistence. In Viswema village, the adherents of *Krüna* though reduce to a few households continue to have their influence upon Christian who constitute the majority of the village population. However, the *Krünamia* also have to make consideration in various cases. In time of festival celebration like *Sekrenyi*, the Christian also take part in the celebration but not in the ritual initiation. For the Christian it is a matter of asserting their cultural identity. On the other hand, the adherents of *Krüna* are able to exercise their influence upon the Christian but it comes with the condition of adjusting the festival days and mingling with the outsiders (Christians) even on the sanctification day when it is forbidden to do so. Therefore, it is evident that for *Krüna* and Christianity to coexist, it requires a (re)appropriation, (re)interpretation of the religious practices and continual negotiation of their difference. Negotiation between the two religions is a continuous process of tension and accommodation, defined not by coercion but by interaction and mutual understanding.

For the Angami, rituals symbolise the unity of the group. And given that village manifested itself as a ritual unit, be it personal or communal rites, every ritual has to be initiated within the village associated with the clan, *khel* or village. Rituals like life passage ritual, sanctification of the body and ritual for initiation of sowing and harvest are some of the important rituals which are complex in nature and has to be meticulously observed. Besides, all these rituals in one way or the other requires the supervision of village priest, *livau*, first sower, first reaper, clan members, funeral kinship. *Krüna* religion is very specific of what is required from its adherents. It is a very demanding, but not to say expensive, religion. And this complexity of the religious practices has a close connection with the phenomenon of conversion among the Angami.

The conversion stories of many late/last converts in the studied villages offer fascinating insights into the complex narratives of conversion where belief in the tenets of Christianity is not always the primary factor. What emerges from many narratives (stories) is

conversion resulting from the inability to meet the expansive and meticulous demands of *Krüna*. With more people converting to Christianity or specifically if the whole clan or village priest gets converted, then it comes to the state of who will initiate the ritual or, who will bury the dead when all the relatives have been converted to Christianity. The rites and rituals serve as a means to deal with the crisis in life, relieve the anxiety and also reaffirm cohesion and social solidarity of the group but in the absence of religious specialist they cannot initiate the ritual, hence, they were left with no option but to convert to Christianity. Besides, *Krüna* being a community-based religion, the Durkheimian notion of collective act of worship was integral for the continuity and existence of *Krüna*. However, with majority of the villagers being Christians, the late convert could no longer relate their beliefs with the given community, which was pertinent for them to achieve a meaningful religious life. It is also interesting to note that the Angami women offers a different conversion story. The custom associated with the unmarried women and the shaving of head had become the reason for Angami women to convert to save their face from the shame if there was no marriage prospect. There was also the case of conversion determined by the gender relation where she cannot convert because of the need to assist her husband to initiate ritual. Therefore, one can clearly see that the conversion of the majority of the villagers to Christianity put a strain upon the *Krüna* adherents to continue their ritual practices which is pertinent for them to make sense of their reality.

The study revealed the phenomenon of religious adaptation and the assertion of a distinct religious identity in the contemporary times. It is evident that the *Krüna* adherents were strongly influenced by the monotheistic idea of Christianity where the notion of Supreme Being is taking centre stage in their cosmology. Earlier, the notion of Supreme Being, *Ukepenuopfü* came under the rubric of *terhuomia* but with a negative connotation given to the term *terhuomia* by the Christians and with the usage of *Ukepenuopfü* as equivalent to Christian God, it has also shaped the cosmological worldview of the *Krüna* adherents. It is interesting to note the way *Krüna* adherents are attempting to keep their religion relevant and at the same time resisting Christianity and posited themselves as followers of original Naga religion. Christianity is seen as an integral part of Naga political identity while on the other hand the adherents of *Krüna* make sense of their identity by resisting this dominant narrative. For the *Krüna* adherents, once a person become a Christian, he/she falls short of being a true Naga. The *Krüna* adherents are also associating themselves with the other indigenous religions at the National level as a way of asserting their religious

identity. Such action also contributed to the speculation of them being assimilated into the Hindu fold. However, the *Krūnamia* does not adhere to the speculations held by the Christians of them getting assimilated into the Hindu fold. Despite, their attempt to reassert a distinct identity in against the Christians and the Hindus, there is very limited space for *Krūna* to mobilise and forge an identity on a larger scale.

To conclude, it has been observed that the majority of the *Krūna* adherents are elders or in their advanced age and very few are young adherents. And one of the main reasons for the younger generation converting to Christianity is because of marriage. Elders have raised their concern on this and said that if they physically retire one day, the day is not far when *Krūna* will also cease to exist. Till now the adherents of *Krūna* are adapting to the given challenges but in a very limited space. Therefore, if *Krūna* has to survive, it might have to reinvent or reform its practices and beliefs. And whether to follow the trace of other prevailed religious reform or not, it still has to creatively come up with a way to mobilise a new form.