

ABSTRACT

The thesis titled ‘Continuity and Change in Indigenous Religion: A study of Angami Nagas’ is a sociological study of the indigenous religion of the Angami Nagas known as *Krüina*, the religion of the forebears. Focusing on the phenomenon of religious conflict and negotiation, religious conversion and adaptation, the study explores the dynamics of *Krüina* religious beliefs as *Krüina* adherents negotiate their sense of belonging and identity in a context where Christianity is the dominant religion and is seen as an integral part of social and political identity.

This study provides an in-depth detailed account of various aspects of Angami religious beliefs and practices. The belief in the existence of *terhuomia* (supernatural being) occupies a central position in the Angami religious thought which gets reflected in their ritual practices in times of sickness, to ward off natural calamities, agricultural related rituals, their belief in life after death and existence of soul and spirit. 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 practice as a community. The coming of British and American missionaries marked a turning point and much changes were brought into their socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs. This study argues that the coming of Christianity divided the village into the convert and non-convert, leading to conflicts between the two. However, there are also efforts to negotiate their difference which at time requires the intervention of the colonial court. This study highlights the nature of negotiation in the colonial period and present times focusing on the theme of *genna* and the festival of *sekrenyi* respectively. For the Angami, rites and ritual serve as a symbolic unity of the group for which every ritual has to be initiated within the village under the supervision of the religious specialist who were also holding the position based on clan specific. The complexity and the specificity of the religious practices added to the fact that majority of the villagers had converted to Christianity becomes a major reason why the Angami converted to Christianity. Focusing on the narratives of the late/last convert, the study elaborated on this phenomenon. With the growing influence of Christianity and the impact of urbanization it has become a challenging task for the *Krüina* adherent to hold on to the religion in the contemporary times. However, there are also signs of religious adaption coping with the changes. While,

in resisting Christianity and to forge a distinct identity, the *Krüna* adherents are placed in a position to negotiate with the Naga political identity and the speculation of assimilating into Hindu fold. Unlike other religious reform movements in the Northeast region, for *Krüna* to maintain a separate identity becomes more challenging given the limitation of the space in which they can mobilise an identity at a larger scale.

The present study has been conducted with the following objectives:

1. To comprehend the nature of indigenous religion among the Angami Nagas.
2. To analyse available scholarship on Angami Nagas from the insiders' perspectives.
3. To study the impact of missionary religions on the belief system and related socio-cultural practices in Nagaland.
4. To highlight recent patterns influencing comprehension about indigenous religion in Nagaland

Theoretical framework

Religion is closely related with the problem of social order and the meaningful nature of social relations. In this light, the following theories on religion have been used to give a framework to the study. Durkheim (1912)- collective representations, Malinowski (1948) - ritual and human needs, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) - social structure, Clifford Geertz (1973)- cultural system and symbols and Peter Berger (1967) - social construction of a religious meaning system.

Review of literature

Literature on the study of indigenous religion, social change, religious conflict, religious conversion, continuity and change in religion, religious reform, religion and identity has been reviewed to comprehend the Angami Indigenous religion and its changing nature and continuity.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. An extensive fieldwork has been carried for data collection. The study relies on the technique of interview schedule, in-depth interview, informal conversation, telephonic interview and participant observation and observation. The study is enriched by secondary source of data- books, journals, souvenirs and

magazines, newspapers, e-resources, published and unpublished articles, PhD thesis, government records

Organization of the thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the research problem. It then locates the Angami Nagas followed by the theoretical framework within which the study is located. The chapter then give a review of literature, research objectives, research questions, methodology and a brief summary of chapter schematization. The second chapter locates and define Angami indigenous religion within the discourses of indigenous religion and then highlight the colonial representation of Naga religious beliefs. To comprehend the nature of Angami indigenous religion, the chapter gives a description of various aspects of religious beliefs and practices. The concepts of *terhuomia*, Supreme Being, spirits, life after death, soul, ritual terms, sacrifices and offering during sickness, religious specialist, village gate, etc., are explained in this chapter. The third chapter explores the various contention issues and the negotiation strategies between the Christians and the adherents of *Krüna* in the colonial period and in present times. The fourth chapter argues that there is a strong linkage between the religious practices and the reason why the Angami are converting. Focusing on the narratives of the late/last converts, the chapter contends that the ritual aspect of *Krüna* is crucial for understanding the dynamics of conversion. The fifth chapter addresses the theme of religious adaptation and how the adherents of *Krüna* in their attempt to keep the religion relevant in contemporary times have been placed them in a position to negotiate and forge a distinct Naga identity. The last chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings of all the chapters.