

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 Statement of the problem

The concept of religion is generally used to describe human's relation to the supernatural powers and the various organised systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed. Though religious beliefs and practices have been a central feature of human society, there is no consensus when it comes to defining religion. The varied definition accounts for the vast diversity of belief system. Among the different approaches used by scholars from various disciplines to understand religion, sociology of religion is concern with understanding the role of religion in society, to analyse its significance and impact upon human history. Durkheim (1912), Malinowski (1948), Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Srinivas (1952), Evans-Pritchard (1965), are some of the sociologists who attempted to show that religion is functional to social cohesion and solidarity of society. The significance of religion in society is such that it has continued to garner and establish an area of study in the sociological understanding of social and cultural life.

According to the 2011 census report on Angami, 98.22% are Christians and 0.71% are following the indigenous religion. Despite the unswerving growth of Christianity in the region, there are people in few Angami villages who continue to adhere and practice *Krüna*, the religion of the forebears. The present thesis is a sociological study of the indigenous religion of the Angami Nagas known as *Krüna*. It seeks to understand the dynamics of *Krüna* religious beliefs as *Krüna* 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.

Historically speaking, Christianity was introduced to the Nagas only in the late 19th century and gained a dominant foothold in Naga society only by the mid-20th century. By the turn of the 21st century, Christianity became the most dominant religion among the Nagas. This rapid conversion of Nagas to Christianity within a span of a century has received wide scholarly attention, not least because of the wide social and cultural transformations that accompanied the conversion to Christianity. However, studies on this religious change among the Nagas often prioritize the narrative of converted Christians whereby themes of conversion, conflict and negotiation are studied through the perspective

of the converted Christians. The discourses are mainly in the line of the impact of Christianity on Naga identity politics (Thomas, 2016; Lotha, 2016; Longvah, 2017; Chophy, 2021) and indigenising Christianity (Joshi, 2012; Joy, 2012; Zhimo, 2015; Angelova, 2017; Chophy, 2019) side-lining the role and aspects of indigenous religion in the society. As a point of departure, this study seeks to understand the nature of Angami indigenous religion or *Krüna* associated with the theme of change and continuity. This study is particularly significant because it will focus on the lives and narratives of the *Krüna* adherents, which has received relatively very little attention in the academic discourses thus far.

The colonial ethnographic materials written in the nineteenth and twentieth century make up the major sources for our understanding of the Nagas in general and their religious beliefs in particular. However, the western conception of religion often tends to be biased and prejudicial towards religious beliefs and practices of people they classified as tribes. Colonial ethnography therefore tends to distort and deny the flexibility of traditional religions (Awolalu, 1976; Platvoe, 1993). Scholars have therefore emphasised the need to understand traditional or indigenous religions by including insights from the native point of view (Beyer, 2010). For instance, Kyle Jackson, writing a decolonial history of Mizoram emphasises the historical indigenous perspective arguing that the indigenous narrative does not fit into the traditional colonial binaries (Jackson, 2023). Similarly, in the context of the Nagas, western conceptual categories such as animism, primitive religion, do not capture the totality and diversity of the religious beliefs and traditions of the Nagas. One of the major concerns of the present study is to re-examine the Angami indigenous religion by amplifying the insiders' view.

Much changes in the religious belief and socio-cultural practices of the Angami has been brought about with the coming of Christianity. Christianity as a new religion came with its own set of beliefs and a way of life which created tensions and divisions in its encounter with the preexisting religion. The conflict between two cultures could come in various forms such as spiritual, cultural, doctrinal and practical (Onuzulike, 2008). Likewise, the underlining feature of *Krüna* as a communal belief was shaken when Christianity divided the village into converts and non-converts especially in times of ritual observation leading to conflict between the two religions. A number of studies on the encounter between Christianity and the Nagas tend to focus on the theme of conflict which posit Christianity

and the religious traditions of the Nagas as diametrically opposed to each other. This trend can be said to have begun with the colonial anthropologist in the early decades of the 20th century such as J H Hutton and Mills who were already delivering bitter critiques against Christian missions and missionaries for destroying the culture and traditions of the Nagas. Scholars have also provided historical analysis of this conflict emerging from the encounter between two religious worldviews (Thomas, 2016; Mepfhü-o, 2016; Thejalhoukho, 2024). On the other hand, sociologists and anthropologists tend to interpret the encounter between Christianity and the Nagas as accommodative in nature. In fact, the study of Richard Eaton in the 1980s called for the need to see beyond the framework of conflict. Eaton shows how conversion to Christianity was intimately connected to the ability of missionaries to translate Christian beliefs into vernacular concepts and cosmologies. But it is in the sociological and anthropological studies that the theme of adaptation gained academic grounding. Gordon Pruettt calls attention to how traditional cultures and practices are accommodated within Christian beliefs system, a process in which tradition is baptized (Pruett, 1974). Avitoli Zhimo further draws attention to the other side of that process, that of indigenizing Christianity (Zhimo, 2015).

However, while the existing literature have contributed much knowledge to the theme of conflict and adaptation in understanding the conversion of Nagas to Christianity, scholars have paid very little attention to how adherents of *Krüna* responded and negotiated with the mass conversions to Christianity and the ascendancy of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Nagas. The existing literature is almost silent on the adherents of *Krüna* in the post-colonial period as though conversion stopped or conflicts between Christian converts and *Krüna* adherents ended. It is also surprising that the sociological and anthropological studies which have directed focus on the process of adaptation in contemporary times tend to overlook and ignore the theme of conflict. These studies only have a tendency to study the relationship between Christians and *Krüna* adherents through the perspective of the Christian converts. The focus is on why Naga Christians converted and how they negotiate with their culture and traditions. There is very little attention paid to why *Krüna* adherents refuse to convert and how they negotiate with the dominant influence of Christianity and Christians around them. For which the adherents of *Krüna* have to continually negotiate its position with the converted Christians, based on continuous interaction and negotiation (Strauss, 1978).

Despite the growing influence of Christianity, the Angami Indigenous religion continue to thrive and it was only in recent years that few villages have fully converted to Christianity. Scholars have argued and given varied reasons on the phenomena of conversion among the Nagas (Eaton, 1984; Joshi, 2012; Zhimo, 2015; Thomas, 2016). However, most of the perspectives on conversion are either confined within the period of 1880s-1960s or deal largely with the appropriation of Christian beliefs. When we consider the fact that conversions occurred into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and even continues till today, we are also confronted by the fact that these late conversions occurred and are occurring in drastically changed socio-economic and political contexts. It can no longer purely an intellectual question or accessing modernity. The question remains, why do people convert then? In this light, the study aims to investigate the phenomena of conversion among the late converts and whether their conversion has any connection with the religious practices.

With Christianity becoming the dominant and de facto official religion (captured in the slogan "Nagaland for Christ") as well as the wide-ranging impact of urbanization, it has become a challenging task for the *Krüna* adherents to hold on to the religion in contemporary times. Similar drastic and rapid transformations in other tribal societies have sparked religious reform movements to preserve their traditional culture, identity and as an act of resistance (Longkumer, 2010; Dangmei, 2021). It is however complicated in the case of the Nagas where Christianity is seen to be intrinsic and central to identity assertion. Given this social and political context, the study will look into how the adherents of *Krüna* are adapting with these challenges and whether there are attempts to revitalise their religion.

This study, therefore, focusing on the phenomenon of religious conflict, negotiation, conversion, and adaptation seeks to understand the dynamics of *Krüna* religious beliefs as *Krüna* 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 seeks to make a contribution by exploring these themes through the framework of *Krüna* religious beliefs. Thus, rather than studying how the converted Christians negotiated with their cultural traditions, the study aims to understand how *Krüna* adherents negotiated with the new reality of Christianity.

## 1.2 A brief introduction to the Nagas

‘Naga’ is a generic term commonly used to identify diverse ethnic groups inhabiting the region that spread across the present Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and the north-western region of Sagaing state in Myanmar. The term developed over the years to describe not only the loosely shared cultures of these various groups but also the political aspirations for nationhood (Stockhausen, 2019). Until the nineteenth century, the people that came to be known as Nagas did not identify themselves with that identity. Capt. John Butler commented in 1875 that the term Naga ‘is quite foreign to the people themselves: they have no generic term applicable to the whole race’ (Butler, 1875, p. 309). Rather, they identified themselves by clan, by village or by *khel* (West, 1994, p. 64). Naga villages were self-governing units and the authority lies within the community (Wouters, 2017). Nagas do not have much interaction as a tribe, instead their identities seemed to be very fluid and built upon diplomatic relation rather than traditional belonging (Stockhausen, 2019). The collective Naga identity is therefore, a relatively recent development that came into vogue through colonial ethnographic practices in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the Naga movement for sovereignty that began on the heels of colonial departure added a significant political dimension to the identity. It is therefore pertinent to note that Naga identity is in many ways a ‘modern’ construct – born from an ethnographic tradition and the assertion of a modern nationhood. Naga as an identity is a political and cultural construct as Andrew West also observed ‘the use of the term Naga as personal and political identity today, stems from the aspirations of Hill peoples toward self-determination, but its construction as a viable entity is very much part of that colonial past’ (West, 1994, p. 55).

Though the history of the Nagas did not start with their encounter with the British, it was in 1826 that Nagas entered the records of colonial history when the kingdom of Burma and the British signed the treaty of Yandabo (Oppitz et al., 2008, p. 11). Consequent upon this treaty, the British gradually established their dominion over the Brahmaputra Valley, Cachar, and the Kingdom of Manipur, edging closer and closer to the hills inhabited by the Nagas. The year 1832 marked a historical watershed when Captains Jenkins and Pemberton marched through the Naga Hills with a following of 700 soldiers and 800 coolies in an attempt to find a land route from Imphal to the plains of Assam through Angami-Naga territory. Historians mark this year as the year of first contact between the

British colonizers and the Nagas. It inaugurated a history of ‘Naga raids’ and British military expeditions into the Naga Hills. No less than ten British military campaigns were organised specifically against the Angami Nagas between 1832 and 1880. A crucial war was fought in 1879-80 when the British sanctioned one of the strongest military operations to quell an uprising of the Angami Nagas. In the aftermath of this war, the British established permanent administration in the Naga with their headquarters at Kohima (Mackenzie, 1884; Chasie, 2005).

Very few ethnic groups received the attention that the Nagas received from colonial ethnographers. The Nagas were among the most extensively studied and widely written tribal communities in the colonial world with colonial administrators such as, J. H. Hutton and J. P. Mills even earning wide recognition and acclaim as renowned ethnographers. However, this ethnographic attention also came with the problem of misrepresentation for colonial writers were deeply informed by the colonial gaze upon the colonized subject. Prior to the coming of the British, as the ‘historical inhabitants’ of the hills, the Nagas followed their own socio-cultural practices and political system (Jackson, 2023, p. 9). As followers of their own religious beliefs, the Nagas are religious in their own way and do not feel the need to define or defend their beliefs. However, the coming of British and American missionaries marked a turning point and much changes were brought into their socio-cultural practices and religious beliefs. Through the gaze of paternalistic colonial officers and zealous missionaries, the Nagas were variously described as ‘heathen’, ‘pagan’ and terms such as, ‘animism’ were used to categorise and describe their religious practices. Their belief systems became a subject of ethnographic interest to the colonial administrators and ethnographers who sought to distinguish and separate the hill tribes from the plainsmen in the Brahmaputra valley.

### **1.2.1 Locating the Angami Nagas**

Angami is one of the major Naga tribes living in Nagaland. According to 2011 census report, the total population of Angami is 1,41,722. In terms of religion 98.22% are Christians and 0.71% follows their indigenous religion. The Angami primarily inhabit Kohima district, and parts of Chümoukedima and Dimapur district.

The term Angami is also a foreign appellation in the sense that the people that are categorised as Angami did not traditionally or historically identify themselves as Angami

(West, 1994). The indigenous term by which the Angami identify themselves even today is Tenyimia and their native tongue is known as Tenyidie (meaning language of the Tenyimia) (Hutton, 1969). It was mostly the British ethnographic tradition that popularised the term 'Angami'. However, in the present day the terms Angami and Tenyimia do not connote the same group of people. The term Tenyimia in the present day is used collectively to refer to various Naga ethnic groups such as, Angami, Chakhesang, Pochury, Rengma, Zeilang, Mao, Maram, Poumai (Liezietsu, 2009, p. 4) who speaks dialects of the Tenyidie language.

The exact meaning of Angami is somewhat shrouded in speculation. Hutton recorded that the term Angami is a corruption of the name 'Gnamei' given to them by the Manipuris (Hutton, 1969, p. 14). Hutton identified a number of groups inhabiting 'Angami Country' on the basis of linguistic and material culture. Hutton also made a distinction between two groups within the Angamis: The Western Angami (Viswema or Dzünokhehena, Kohima, Khonoma and Chakroma) whom he regarded as 'Angami par excellence', 'Tengima proper' (Hutton, 1969, p. 15), 'Angami proper' (Hutton, 1969, p. 23), and Eastern Angami (Chakrima, Kezama and Memi). The Eastern Angami in Hutton's ethnography are today identified as Chakhesang. Hutton further classified the 'Angami proper' into four groups on the basis of differences in dialects and practices. They are, Khonoma group, Kohima group, Viswema group and Chakhroma group which also roughly corresponds with the present day four range division of the Angamis, namely Western, Northern, Southern, and Chakhro. Kohima and the surrounding villages are known as the Northern Angami, those living to the West of Kohima are the Western Angami, and those to the south of Kohima are the Southern Angami, while those living on the slopes along the national highway from Kohima to Dimapur are the Chakhroma Angami. Amongst these four Angami groups, the Southern Angami prefers to identify themselves as the Zounuo-Keyhonuo and demand that this name be granted recognition (Das, 1993, p. 18).

When one look into the ethno-history of the people identified as Angami, they never acted together in any context either in the past or present as a homogenous group (Das, 1993, p. 19). They do not form any sort of an interactive network, instead, one group interact more frequently with its adjacent tribal groups than it does with any tribe of the so-called Angami constellation. According to Wouters, Naga villages are self-governing units which also manifests itself as a ritual unit (Wouters, 2017, p. 21). The beliefs and practices differ

from village to village and their relevance or meaning may change outside of its particular spatial context (Thomas, 2019), the limits of which are embodied in the village gate. The Angami people as a whole therefore, emerge as a mixed and heterogenous community rather than a 'true tribe' (Das, 1993, p. 19). Besides, given the fact that the Chakhesang tribe (described as Eastern Angamis in Hutton's *The Angami Nagas*) was created as a separate category in 1946. N.K Das raised concerns in using the category 'Angami' as an ethnographic entity and preferred to use the native term Zounuo-Keyhonuo in his study on the Viswema village (Das, 1993, p. 19).

It is imperative to acknowledge the heterogeneity embedded within the category of Angami before conducting any study that takes the tribe as a unit of analysis. In the context of this study, it is pertinent to ask whether there is such a thing as 'Angami religion'. Any study that attempts to understand the religious expression of a particular community, in this case the Angami Nagas, must be wary of categories of identity. In that sense, even the usage of the category 'Angami indigenous religion' has its own intellectual baggage because it assumes the existence of a homogenous and unified sets of beliefs that can be identified as 'Angami.' However, as scholars have argued and shown, tribal identities are deeply entrenched in colonial ethnographic frameworks and are therefore 'modern' constructs. It is also important to note that such group identities do not always necessarily coincide with traditional social and religious imaginations. If, as scholars have argued, the village and the clan were the true social and political unit rather than the tribe, to speak of Angami culture or Angami religion may seem to be a misnomer. There are no prescribed sets of beliefs or practices common to all the people identified as Angamis that can be called Angami indigenous religion. But that does not mean that the people identified as Angamis are devoid of religious systems, it only means that such belief systems may not represent a coherent shared structure. Therefore, in this study, Angami indigenous religion is used to refer to the religious beliefs and practices of the people who are today identified as Angamis. Traditionally and historically, in many of the Angami villages, the terms *Kriina* and *Tsana*, both meaning the religion of the forebears, are used to refer to the belief systems. In this study, Angami indigenous religion and *Kriina* are used interchangeably.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

According to Turner, there are two issues which have been central to the development of sociological theory in general and sociology of religion in particular. First, the matter of



social order. Second, the social meaning of life (Turner, 1991, p. viii). Sociology of social order which is associated with the study of conflict, dissent and changes, look into the existence of a common moral system or values that binds the people together in a community. Here, religion is regarded as a social cement which binds the individual and social group into a communal order. On the other hand, an enquiry into the purposeful action of human, the uncertainties in human life and how religious practices are used as a means for structuring human relationships is a subject of interest to the sociology of religion. Therefore, 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.

### **Emile Durkheim- collective representations**

Emile Durkheim (1912) emphasised the nature and function of religion in human society. Against the individualistic and cognitive interpretation of Tylor, Müller and Frazer, the elementary forms set out to show that religion does not consist of belief in spirits or gods, but rather religion is found in a categorical distinction between a sacred world in opposition to a profane realm. The collective nature of religion was central to Durkheim's analysis. For him, religious rituals and symbols are at roots, representations of the social group. These collective representations are the ways by which the group expresses something important about itself to its members. Thus, by participating in group rituals, individual members renew their link with the group, and they learn and reaffirm shared meanings. Religion, according to Durkheim is a communal activity.

### **Malinowski – ritual and human needs**

Bronislaw Malinowski conceived of religion as arising from basic needs and predicaments. In his work, *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (1948), viewed that magic and religion arose from emotional stress and anxiety in the face of difficulties and uncertainties. He emphasised on the functional role of magic and religion which sacralises and guides human beings through their earthly crisis such as, birth, puberty, marriage and death. He noted that these crises are surrounded by rituals. Rituals reduce anxiety by providing confidence and feeling of control. Funeral ceremonies are social events which unite the group to deal with situations of stress, and so the unity of the group is strengthened.

### **A.R. Radcliffe-Brown - social structure**

Another functional explanation of religion is given by Radcliffe-Brown. In his essay 'Religion and Society' in the book, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952) propounded that the religious structure is determined by the social structure. For him, the function of religion is to instill a sense of dependence in it. Unlike Malinowski, he gives more importance to the survival of the group than that of individual because without social survival, individual survival is not possible. Radcliffe-Brown emphasised on the social function of rituals and that religious ritual is an expression of the unity of society enabling its members to live together in an orderly social way.

### **Clifford Geertz - cultural system and symbols**

In his essay 'Religion as a Cultural System' in the book, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), developed a symbolic definition of religion describing what religion does. Geertz defined religion as "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz, 1973, p. 90). Culture are inherited conception expressed in symbolic forms. Culture as sacred symbols function to synthesis a people's ethos - the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood and their worldview (ibid., 1973, p. 89). Sacred symbols or religion provide a model of the world and describe what life is and prescribes what it ought to be. Religion also provides a worldview which establishes a cosmology that satisfies one's intellectual need for reasonable explanation. The worldview works because it convinces the people that life makes sense, suffering is meaningful hence bearable and that justice will prevail someday (Roberts & Yamane, 2012, p. 9-10).

### **Peter Berger - social construction of a religious meaning system**

Peter Berger's understanding of religion is contained in his classic, *The sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967). According to Berger, religion as a distinctive part of human society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product and an external reality that acts back upon its producer. The fundamental dialectic process of society consists of three steps: externalization, objectivation and internalization. It is

through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality. And it is through internalization that man is a product of society. The appropriation of the external world is continuously shaped by the experiences and meaning which gives to a meaningful order called 'nomos'. The 'nomos' is made up of the society's worldview (knowledge about how things are) and 'ethos' (values and ways of living), hence it is a social construct. It plays an important role by acting 'as a shield against terror' to provide order and a meaningful life (Berger, 1967, p. 22). There always remain the possibility to disrupt the nomos especially in time of encountering with death, insanity, etc., hence this is where religion enters and strengthen the socially constructed nomos. The nomos through religion acquired sacred character and become a sacred cosmos. Attaching meaning to a worldview is a human process and for the continuous existence of meaning system, Peter Berger emphasized the concept of 'plausibility structures' (Berger, 1967, p. 45). According to Berger, the socially constructed world of human groups is constantly under threat, and thus, there are particular social processes which maintain the human constructed social world, but the interruption of these social processes leads to the dismantling of the plausibility structure and hence change the perspective.

The theories of Durkheim, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Geertz, and Berger all emphasize the social and functional roles of religion in human society, with each contributing a unique perspective. All these theories have given a framework to the study. However, Durkheim's theory on religion as a communal activity is particularly important for this study because it highlights the role of religion in fostering social unity and collective identity. In the context of the present study, Durkheim's focus on collective representations and rituals helps explain the religious practices of the Angami and how their religious practices, even in the face of modern challenges can continue to strengthen social bonds and promote unity within communities. His approach underscores the importance of communal participation in religious life, which is central to understanding the role of religion in maintaining social order and solidarity in contemporary societies.

## **1.4 Concepts**

### **Indigenous religion**

James Cox (2007) outlines the central characteristics of indigenous religions, emphasising their deep connection to specific geographic locations. Participants in these religions are

typically native to these areas and intrinsically linked to them. Another crucial aspect of indigenous religion is their kinship-based worldview. This worldview operates through a sense of belonging and interconnectedness that extends beyond immediate family ties to encompass ancestors, spirits, and the natural world. Ancestor spirits hold a central place in the religious life and practice of indigenous communities (Cox, 2007, p. 69).

### **Negotiation**

According to Anselm Strauss, negotiation refers to the possible means of getting things accomplished when parties need to deal with each other to get things done (Strauss, 1978). Strauss in his attempt to understand the mechanism of negotiation propounded the concept of 'negotiated order' and opined that a given social order is inconceivable without some form of negotiation. Hence, social order is a negotiated order. Negotiation, according to Strauss is not based either on the assumption of a rationalistic, efficiency-based perspective or a fixed set of rules, rather it is based on a continuous interaction and negotiation, where individuals and groups work together to establish, maintain, and sometimes modify the order that governs their lives.

Negotiation always takes place within social settings. The various structural conditions of the setting affect the actions of the negotiating parties, the aims they pursue through negotiation and alternative modes of action, their tactics during the negotiations and the outcomes of negotiations in turn may affect not only future courses of action but also the social setting themselves. (Strauss, 1978, p. 235)

Drawing from Strauss's framework, this study examines the conflict between the religious groups among the Angami people and how their interaction and negotiation change their religious practices.

### **Conversion**

The term conversion refers to a process of 'turning around' or changing direction in life (Robert & Yamane, 2012, p. 123). Religious conversion, therefore, can be understood as the process by which a person commits to the beliefs of a new religious tradition and shifts away from the previously held religious beliefs.

Snow and Machalek take a sociological approach in studying religious conversion. They view conversion as a socially constructed phenomenon and not just an internal, individual psychological change. They argue that converts' accounts of their conversion are shaped

by the social and ideological context of the religious groups to which they belong. Converts learn to frame their experiences in ways that align with the group's beliefs and expectations. They argue that social networks play a critical role in conversion, particularly the importance of social ties and group membership. The social environment includes relationship with family, friends, and fellow group members, help facilitates conversion. According to Snow and Machalek, conversion is a process that unfolds over time, rather than a one-time event, influenced by ideological shifts, group practices, and the individual's evolving identity (Snow & Machalek, 1984).

## **Ritual**

Ritual as a collective representation refers to the idea that rituals are not just individual actions but shared social practices that embody and reflect the collective values, beliefs, and identities of a community. According to Durkheim, rituals serve as a symbolic medium through which societal norms and shared meanings are expressed, enacted, and reaffirmed (Durkheim, 1912). Through rituals, individuals experience and express a sense of belonging to a group. It marks and affirms an individual's place within the larger social structure, whether through rites of passage, religious observance, or collective celebration. When people engage in the same ritual, they not only reassert their personal beliefs but also strengthen the collective bond with others in their community. Therefore, ritual according to Durkheim is essential in maintaining social cohesion.

The concept of ritual as a creation of social reality is drawn from the work of Ana S. Iltis (2012). According to Iltis, Rituals are performative acts that both shape and reinforce social realities for those who participate in them and those who stand apart. They serve four key functions. First, rituals establish and reinforce a web of social bonds by defining expectations, relationships, and roles within a community. Second, rituals contribute to maintaining stability and harmony by upholding social structures and norms. Third, rituals define group membership, allowing individuals to see themselves as part of specific communities while simultaneously marking boundaries between those included and excluded. Through this, they map the social geography of the world and highlight the divisions that separate us. Finally, rituals imbue time and significant life events with meaning, helping individuals and groups interpret and make sense of life's transitions and milestones (Iltis, 2012).

## 1.5 Social change among the tribes

With the changes and transformation taking place among the tribals due to cultural contact, social change in tribal society has become an important subject of analysis among social anthropologists. The notion of tribe was generally conceived in the line that tribals lived in isolation hence treated as savage and primitive. However, social anthropology has now move away from such stereotypes and emphasised on interaction and interdependence between the tribes and non-tribes.

T. K. Oommen identifies three perspectives in his attempt to situate the tribes in Indian society. The first view is designated as ‘assimilationist’ advocated by G.S. Ghurye who labelled the schedule Tribes as ‘backward Hindus’. In this view culture change of the tribes would see as adapting to the high culture of the upper caste Hindus depicting a process of displacement of tribal culture. In opposition to this, the second view is referred to as ‘isolationist’ propagated by Verrier Elwin. In this view, tribal culture is distinct from non-tribal Indian cultures hence its integrity should be maintained by preventing any intrusion by outsiders. Culture change in this perspective is an endogenous process. The third perspective which accepts the possibility of selective mutual borrowing of cultural elements is labelled as ‘acculturationist’, best known to be advocated by D. N. Majumdar. In this view, culture change comes about through interaction between tribes and non-tribes (Oommen, 2009, p. 8-9).

In the context of tribes in Northeast, one of the distinctive features that set them apart in comparison to other tribes in India is that, ‘Sanskritisation has not been at work in the north-eastern hills’ (Singh, 1982, p. 1377). Instead, Christianity has emerged as the strongest factor of modernization, and given the tribals a strong sense of identity (ibid.). When it comes to social change in Northeast, it is colonialism and the advent of Christianity that marks the point of departure. And in post-colonial period it is the Indian state, market and civil society of which church forms an important element of change (Oommen, 2009, p.10).

Christianity as mentioned by Subba is a movement rather than ‘religion’ and it claims to have the energy to transform all cultures (Subba et al., 2009). However, the ongoing change in northeast India is not a unilinear process (Oommen, 2009, p.13). It is inevitable that in any process of change there is a partial ‘displacement’ of the old cultural pattern.

But it is also not true that the new cultural pattern is adopted in totality and the ‘accretion’ that occurs is also partial. Thus, what happens in the real world of change is the co-existence of displacement and accretion. The emergent product is neither the old nor the new, but a mutation of the two. Hence, the prevailing worldview of the tribes in northeast is a mutation of the pre-Christian and Christian worldview (Oommen, 2009, p.13).

## **1.6 Literature review**

### **Changing nature of traditional religion**

Drawing from the context of Africa, the following literature were reviewed to examine the flexible and changing nature of traditional religion.

J.G. Platvoe (1993) argues that the inclusion of African traditional religions as one of the primitive religions of mankind has severely distorted their traditional religions. This biasness has denied them their flexibility and historicity, and a place among the modern religions. Platvoe further gives an outline of what marks African Traditional religions. According to Platvoe, the community religions of the traditional societies of sub-Saharan Africa are marked by 1) Low visibility, 2) complexity of belief representations, 3) pragmatism, 4) reciprocity, 5) laxity in religious duties, and 6) vagueness of variety in, belief representations, 7) adoptive, 8) adaptive, 9) non-ethical and 10) monotheistic as well as polytheistic and perhaps pantheistic.

In a similar vein, Beyer citing Magesa, argues that western scholars defined African religion in terms of western philosophy and that if there was such a thing approximating to religion at all in Africa, the western scholar understands it as animism or fetishism (Beyer, 2010, p. 1). Besides, category like primal religion, a religion originated and developed in relative isolation from other cultures, was used to designate African traditional religion. Therefore, Beyer pleads for a broader scope of understanding religion by including insights from an African point of view.

According to Awolalu (1976), African traditional religion means the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebearers of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion, but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is largely written in the peoples’ myths and folktales,

in their songs and dances, liturgies, shrines, proverbs. It has no historical founder or missionaries to propagate the religion; it has no membership, yet have their roots in the indigenous religion (Awolalu, 1976). In arguing against the usage of misleading terms like primitive, savage, fetishism, heathenism, paganism, animism, idolatry and polytheism, Awolalu emphasised the belief in the Supreme Being as the central focus in African belief.

Similarly, Shorter in his study of the Kimbu and Nyamwezi peoples of Western Tanzania argues that African traditional religion is not a thing of the past. It is a mistake to conclude that African traditional religion is a dead or dying tradition. Despite the fact that the structure of African society has undergone changes due to urbanization and rural revolution, the African traditional religion continues to live on in the mind of the people, jostling with newer Christian and Islamic ideas (Shorter, 1978).

Pobee (1976) in his analysis of African traditional religion of West Africa, the Akan group of Ghana, argues that the African culture has not been static due to the coming of Christianity and the impact of western culture. Pobee further raised the pertinent question of how traditional is traditional and how indigenous is indigenous? He used traditional in the line of what is aboriginal, natural or fundamental. Traditional religion includes the beliefs and practices of historic native African peoples with regard to supernatural, which were handed down by the ancestors and which people hold on to as their link with both the past and eternity.

These works have helped the researcher to understand the nature of indigenous religion and in particular to understand Angami Indigenous religion from the perspective of the Angami.

### **Religious conflict and negotiation**

Focusing on the theme of resistance and negotiation, Kristjandottir (2015) analysed the material culture of the European and argues that becoming Christian requires a long-term transformation which is organised through everyday resistance, reaction, negotiation and compromises made by the members of society in response to tension constantly arising between traditional and post-traditional habits in everyday life.

There is a tendency for conflict to arise whenever two or three culture meet which could come in various forms such as spiritual, cultural, doctrinal and practical (Onuzulike,2008).



Onuzulike argues that the conflict between African Traditional Religion and Christianity is due to the difficulty in maintaining some of African culture which appears to be in contradiction with Christian faith and this in turn created confusion among the African Christians. The author further points out that spiritual conflicts exist between African Traditional Religion and Christianity because religion is deeply embedded in African culture, hence there is a need to bridge the gap between faith and culture.

Poon (2011) made a significant study on the tension between modernity and religion in China and how the common people negotiate with the government. In 1900s, as a part of the modernist project the China government begin to eradicate the temples, eliminate deity images, forbade the common people to celebrate traditional festivals which holds a central position in their religious as well as social life. Poon pointed out that the government action was not well received by the common people because any forms of change mean a restructuring of the old order and represents a challenge to the existing value system of the common people. He argues that the common people were continually making adaptations to their religious practices in order to fit into the state-approved forms of religion, which resulted in the fusion of their own traditions with the official culture, thus blurring the line between religion, superstition and state culture.

In the Indian context, Antony Copley in his book, *Religions in conflict* (2011) propounded that conflict and tension arise when there is a clash of ideology between two different cultures. He throws light on the Christian mission in India in the nineteenth century and the complexity of the movement and its associated power dynamics. According to Copley, the resilience of Hinduism resilience which posed a challenge to the mission comes from the ignorance of the Christian missionaries about Indian religious tradition, the caste system. This ignorance proves to be a shortcoming of the missionaries. In their eyes, the caste system became an object of disdain not for its potential for social exploitation but because it provided an obstacle to conversion.

The works of Kristjandottir, Onuzulike, Poon and Copley have offered valuable insights to understand the nature of religious conflict in everyday life, spiritual, culture, ideology and how people negotiate to fit into the new system leading to a fusion of tradition.

## **Religious conversion**

Clifford Geertz in his analysis of religion and religious change makes an interesting argument on how a society takes the path of rationalising its traditional religion. In his article *“Internal conversion” in contemporary Bali*, Geertz made an analysis of the religious transformation in Bali drawing from the concept of Weber’s religious rationalisation and that rationalised religions are “more abstract, more logically coherent, and more generally phrased” (Geertz, 1973, p. 172). With the disenchantment of the world, the distance between man and the sacred increases, and the ties between them have to be established in a ‘much more deliberate and critical manner’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 174). A new formalised religious system becomes imperative which is provided by the world religion. In the case of Bali, when modern forces like- education, modern governmental form and modern political consciousness shake the foundation of Balinese social order, people did not convert to any of the great missionary religions- Christianity, Islam or Buddhism but instead underwent an ‘internal conversion’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 182). It is the young, educated people who play an instrumental role in making a new rationalised Balinese religion. They start to access their religious practices critically and asked questions which required new answers and, in the process, a new Balinese emerged based on rediscovered classical Balinese texts and the Balinese Hindu Heritage (Geertz, 1973, p. 181-189).

In the context of India, Robinson (2004) argues that conversion to Christianity among the Hindu people of Goa was not a voluntary decision but was forced upon since that was the only option left. This is because their temples were destroyed and they were prohibited from celebrating the festivals which made it impossible to maintain a Hindu symbolic life. In such cases, the people see conversion as the only way to prevent their world from falling apart.

Karlsson (2000) in his study of the Rabha community critique the narrative of Rabha as being a passive recipient of imperial religion but instead viewed them as agents actively engaged in constructing a new identity as Rabha Christians in opposition to the traditional Hindu custom. On the question of why the Rabha community converted to Christianity, he highlighted that there is a close connection of the threat of losing their forest with conversion. The Rabhas regarded the forest as the existential point of their lives and without the forest they cease to exist as people. In such a dire situation, Christianity appears to provide people with a new sense of belonging and security. The author also pointed out

that the people are inclined towards Baptist instead of Adventist because the former was organized ethnically while the latter was not hence resulting in the reinforcement of religious and ethnic identification.

### **Ritual change**

M.N. Srinivas in his work, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs in South Asia* (1952) directed attention to the social function of rituals which are expressed to maintain the solidarity and continuity of the structural system. He highlighted the fluidity of Sanskrit Hinduism which enable to absorb local religious elements and on the other hand, the Hindu deities frequently undergo change in the process of being localized.

Erik de Maarker in his article, 'From the Songsarek Faith to Christianity: Conversion, Religious Identity and Ritual Efficacy' (2007) pointed out how the structure and contents of the Songsarek ritual had been modified to suit Christian beliefs. Especially with regard death ritual where the corpse is kept bare by Songsarek was dressed; the inexpensive jewellery had been replaced by garlands; for fanning the corpse, cock's tail feathers had been replaced by paper flags. The ritual had been modified but the essential remains.

### **Literature on the religion of Naga tribes**

#### **Christianity and traditional religion**

Panger Imchen in his book, *Ancient Ao Naga Religion and Culture* (1993) argues against the usage of the term animism and justified that even Biblical religion has animistic elements but do not fall into the category of animism. He opined that Ao religion laid the foundation for the coming of Christianity. To prove his argument, he brings out the themes and concepts of Ao religion that are similar to Christian doctrines. Emphasising on the prevalence of Supreme God he regarded Ao religion a monotheism like Christianity. He also draws similarity between Christianity and Ao religion's concept of life after death, the incarnation of God in the form of man and the Ao's belief in the incarnate of *Lichaba*, the sacrifice of blameless cock in Ao religion and lamb in ancient Jews. On the other hand, he also points out the Christian concepts like salvation, forgiveness, and overcome evil by accepting Christ, which are lacking in Ao religion. He argues that it is this lack in Ao religion that enable the people to accept Christianity to fill the void. Imchen presents Ao religion as a well organised religion similar to Christian faith. This presentation of Ao

religion by the Naga Christian was however critique by Tzüdir (2019). The Ao Christian makes sense of the traditional religion by relating it to Christianity and this Tzüdir argues that “pre-existing structures has shaped the nature of Christianity, but what was ‘pre-existent’ was also structured by the Christian world-view of those who represented the past” (Tzüdir, 2019, p. 83).

### **Christianity and identity formation**

Gordon Pruettt throws lights on the impact of Christianity in his work, *Christianity, history, and culture in Nagaland* (1974). He opined that though the missionaries have brought radical changes to the Naga culture, the Baptist in Nagaland was successful only after ‘Baptist polity meshes happily with Naga tribal policy’. There are signs where the Naga Christians actively sought to recover and integrate their culture identity through dress, songs and dance and that now one cannot conceive Christianity outside the native culture. He argued the Baptist mission played a crucial role in the Naga self-consciousness and identity structure.

John Thomas in his work, *Evangelising the Nation* (2016) traces the intertwining of Christianity and Naga nationalism in the emergence of a distinct Naga identity. As argued by Thomas, conversion and the newly formed Christian identity has come to be merged with the political movement and ultimately became the mouthpiece to express their Naga identity.

Another work on the role of religion and the rise of Naga nationalism can be found in Abraham Lotha’s work, *The Hornbill Spirit: Nagas Living their Nationalism* (2016). According to Lotha, the values and elements present in the traditional religious belief has strengthened the Naga nationalist movement. For him, there is no contradiction between traditional and Christian worldview hence both equally impacted the Nationalist movement.

Shonreiphy Longvah in her work, *Christian Conversion, the Rise of Naga National Consciousness, and Naga Nationalist Politics* (2017) diverts our attention to the complex linkages between Christianity and Naga nationalism. She contrasts traditional Naga religion, which did not provide Nagas with a common platform to come together politically, to Naga Christianity, which offered Nagas with a common denominator and so

fostered Naga self-awareness as a political community with a shared identity and political destiny.

Kanato Chophy's recent work, *Christianity and Politics in Tribal India* (2021) shows the parallel growth of Baptist Christianity and the Naga movement with a close overlap between missionaries and revolutionary leaders. Chophy argues that the story of the Naga movement cannot be understood in separation from the story of Baptist Christianity.

Iliyana Angelova in her work, *Colonial rule, Christianity and Socio-cultural (dis)continuities among the Sumi Naga* (2017) demonstrate how the social impact of Christian conversion has come to shape the way in which a new Sumi identity is being reconstituted. She argues that Christianity should not merely be viewed as an external agent of change but as an intrinsic part of contemporary Sumi identity and as a tradition reinventing and reasserting itself which is 'creatively embedding Christianity within a solid substratum of cultural reproduction' (Angelova, 2017, p. 81).

### **Indigenizing Christianity and conversion**

Somingam Mawon in her article, 'Continuity and Change in Hao Naga festivals' (2017), stated that Christianisation and assimilation with the Western culture are major factors responsible for the discontinuation and changes in the festival of Hao Nagas. She highlighted the revival of some festivals in modified form where the old ways are being Christianized by reorienting rituals towards the Christian God, employing Christian prayers and singing hymns during the festival.

Avitoli Zhimo in her work, *Indigenising Christianity: Politics of Conversion among the Sumi Naga* (2015) highlighted the retention of some traditional practices in modified form even after conversion to Christianity. She mentioned about how the marriages among the Sumi had taken the form of a western way of solemnization however, a role-playing custom continues where certain relatives are chosen to play the role of father, mother, uncle, younger brother, and aunt for the newly married couple. Another continuity in beliefs is the belief that the souls linger behind and can be brought back after praying. Zhimo also stated that the tradition of offering in which the first-borne cattle or harvest made to the church appears to resemble the animistic propitiation though the motive is different.

Kanato Chophy throw light on the fluidity of traditional belief in his book, *Constructing the Divine* (2019). He pointed out how the belief in supernatural beings is at the heart of traditional religion, and the location of supernatural beings in social life had remained invariably the same when the Sumi embraced Christianity and thus, indigenisation of its teaching to cater to the local situation is an important development of Christianity among the Sumi.

Rimai Joy's *Religion of Tangkhul Nagas: Continuity and Change* (2012) is another work on the indigenization of Christianity. He gives a detail account on how the people even after conversion continues to hold on to the traditional values and culture with some modification - the propitiation of spirits with their best harvest replaced by the practice of tithes and offering; the role of the neighbours and relatives during burial; the belief in life after death replaced by the notion of paradise; the position of village priest replaced by the Church pastor; continuity in the celebration of festivals.

Vibha Joshi in her study of healing practices among the Angamis, *A Matter of Belief* (2012) points out the fluidity of religious acceptance and belief. She places particular emphasis on the agency of individuals in appropriating Christian beliefs to suit their own personal beliefs and practices. She mentioned how festivals like *Sekrenyi* is celebrated by both the non-Christians and Christians in which the Christians participate in the festivities but do not perform any of the rituals associated with it. She opined that the celebration of *Sekrenyi* by both the non-Christians and Christians also speaks of a strong continuity of traditional practice and belief in the celebration of the festival for the health of the community and village.

Richard Eaton's *Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas* (1984) examined the fluidity of Naga religious belief and pointed out how conversion among the Nagas was determined by the meshing of Christian cosmology and made to fit into various Naga cosmologies. Given the disproportion rate of conversion among certain tribes, Eaton (1984) questioned why the pace of conversion is very slow among the Angamis comparing to the Aos and Sumis. He argues that social change or early exposure to mission cannot be the reason why people convert given the Angamis being in a position to access both. Conversion, Eaton opined, was intellectual. Conversion for the Naga operates on how Christian cosmology was made to fit into their belief system, Naga religious cosmology. Eaton argued that the mission translation policy followed a course that suited the Ao and Sema contexts while it

followed the opposite course in the Angami context. *Tsungrem* for the Aos represented an inflation of a generic word for 'spirit' into an all-embracing supreme deity. And *Alhou* of the Sema was an existing supreme god made even more powerful by its identification with the Judeo-Christian deity. But in the case of Angami, neither 'Jihova' nor 'Ukepenuopfü' was an easily assimilable translation for the Christian God (Eaton, 1984, p. 40). Thus, conversion for the Nagas was an intervention into the cognitive realm of the local people.

Ketholenuo Mepfhü-o (2016) looked into conversion not just as a change of religion but the effects it has on the socio and cultural life of the Nagas. She argues that the intervention of Christianity among the Nagas is seen through the changes brought about in terms of 'drinking' and 'clothing' whereby, the newly convert constructed a new Christian self that was distinct from the existing Naga self. For the Nagas, Christianity meant a change of their lifestyle which imply a reorientation of their thinking.

### **Religious reform movement**

Arkotong Longkumer talked about religious reforms in his book, *Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging the Heraka Movement of Northeast India* (2010). Longkumer argues that the Heraka in their attempt to reform their religion and to resist the spread of Christianity has adopted the Hindu symbols. For the Heraka it is more a question of survival and day-to-day resistance rather than catering to the idea of nationhood. Hence, the Zeme Heraka were able to accommodate different identities without fixing themselves to anyone.

Michael Heneise in his work, *Christianity, Millenarianism, and Identity among the Konyak Naga* (2021) argues that the emergence of millenarian community among the Konyak Naga known as Yahoï religious movement is by and large a response to decades of disproportionate levels of poverty, war, and neglect.

These literatures on religious change and continuity have been instrumental in guiding the researcher in framing and structuring the thesis, as well as in formulating its key arguments.

## **1.7 Research objectives**

The 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

## **1.8 Research Questions**

The study has been guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the Angami understanding of religion?
2. How do the colonial and the Christian missionaries perceive the Angami indigenous religion and vice-versa?
3. Is there any contention between the two religions? If so, how do the two religions resolve their differences?
4. Are there any changes in the way the adherents of indigenous religion observe the rituals?
5. What are the reasons why the Angami are converting to Christianity?
6. How are the adherents of *Krüna* coping and adapting with the challenges in present times?

## **1.9 Research Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature. Since the aim of the research is to get an understanding of the Angami religious beliefs and practices, the collection of data has generously relied on the technique of interview schedule, in-depth interview, informal conversation, telephonic interview and participant observation and observation. Interview method has been used to collect data from the respondents irrespective of Christians and adherents of indigenous religion. While, case study is done on selected cases like celebration of festivals, rituals to get a grasp of how these practices are done in the present times and more importantly to supplement the arguments in the study. Furthermore, the technique of



observation is used in the household of the indigenous religion followers to get a better understanding of their daily lives. Unstructured in-depth interview has also been deployed to gather the narratives of the informants. In regard to the selection of the informant, purposive sampling technique is used to locate the adherents of *Krüna* and the early converts, the late/last converts and those who are considered knowledgeable of the religious practices. The researcher interviewed the *Krüna* adherents irrespective of age and sex, their children who have converted to Christianity were interviewed to get a sense of the family dynamics with two different religious beliefs. The early converts and the late converts are the targeted informants with the assumption that their experiences will differ during the course of time. And the converts who are considered knowledgeable of *Krüna* practices. All together 55 respondents were interviewed. Out of which 11 respondents are adherents of *Krüna*. The unit of analysis is individual and not household. The profile of respondents is given in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2.

The audio-visual equipment like camera and recorder are used to supplement the data collection. When needed, camera is used to capture important moments, places, figures and ceremonial rites which has been used in the thesis. With the permission of the informants, the narratives of the informants have been recorded which usually last for not less than one hour to be transcribed in English afterwards. The interviews were conducted in their native dialect and since the narration includes phrases and idioms, recording comes handy in such situations.

The study was carried out in three phases. Accordingly, the first phase has been carried out during April 2020 to March 2021 (but due to Covid, to engage in the fieldwork becomes difficult however, fieldwork was carried out and interviews were taken sparsely whenever time and situation permits). The second phase commenced from December 2021 to February 2022 and the final phase was carried out from December 2022 to January 2023; while frequent visits has been made apart from these durations.

As for secondary data, reviews of relevant literatures, books, journals, souvenirs and magazines, newspapers, e-resources, published and unpublished articles, PhD thesis, and government records were collected and used.

**Table 1.1: Respondents' profile 1**

<b>Respondents' demographic and socio-economics characteristics</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
Age	20 years and below	1
	21-30	1
	31-40	5
	41-50	1
	51-60	10
	61-70	22
	71 and above	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>55</b>
Gender	M	38
	F	17
<b>Total</b>		<b>55</b>
Religion	Krüna	11
	Christianity	44
<b>Total</b>		<b>55</b>
Educational qualification	Illiterate	15
	Below 10 <sup>th</sup>	21
	10 <sup>th</sup> passed	4
	12 <sup>th</sup> passed	3
	Graduate	7
	Post Graduate and above	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>55</b>
Occupational status	Farmer	22
	Farmer cum Village priest, village gate keeper,	4
	Church worker (Pastor)	6
	Retired Govt employee/Govt employee	17
	Village chairman /Goan Burah	3
	Social worker/ Educationist	2
	Student	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>55</b>

**Table 1.2 Respondents' profile 2**

Data collection technique	No. of Respondents				Respondents' specific demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
	Krüna adherents	Early Christian converts	Late Christian converts	Total	
<b>Study village Kohima</b>					
Interview schedule		5	3		Respondents from Kohima village include church pastor, village chairman, village goan burah, professor and educationist.
In-depth interview			1		
<b>Total</b>				<b>9</b>	
<b>Study village Khonoma</b>					
Interview schedule		5	5		Respondents from Khonoma village include the village chairman, village elders and the late convert who comes from a religious specialist family.
In-depth interview		1			
<b>Total</b>				<b>11</b>	
<b>Study village Mezoma</b>					
Interview schedule		3	7		Respondents of late converts from Mezoma village include farmers who served as <i>livau</i> , and first harvester.
In-depth interview		2			
<b>Total</b>				<b>12</b>	
<b>Study village Viswema</b>					
Interview schedule	8	7	5		Respondents of <i>Krüna</i> adherents from Viswema village include village priest, village headman, priest helper and village gatekeeper. The early converts include pastor, village chairman and the children of village priest and first sower. While the late converts include student and govt. employees whose parents are <i>Krüna</i> adherents.
In-depth interview	1				
Telephonic interview	2				
<b>Total</b>				<b>23</b>	
<b>Grand Total</b>				<b>55</b>	
<p>Note 1: Informal conversation has been conducted with members of the villagers in addition to the 55 respondents.</p> <p>Note 2: Telephonic interview was used as a follow-up interview with the respondents and also additional informants.</p> <p>Note 3: Participant observation and observation were used as a supplementary tool to observe some selected events such as <i>Sekrenyi</i> festival etc and also on the everyday life of the <i>Krüna</i> adherents as well as the Christian converts.</p>					

### 1.10 Research Sites

The study was carried out among the Angami tribe located in Nagaland. It is a multi-sited research. The researcher selected four Angami villages; Kohima (administratively belonging to the Northern Angami), Khonoma and Mezoma (Western Angami) and Viswema (Southern Angami). These sample villages are selected on the account that it was only in recent years that Christianity marked its full attendance in the three villages (out of the four research sites), namely, Kohima, Khonoma and Mezoma while *Krüna* is still found to be prevalent in Viswema village (the fourth research site).

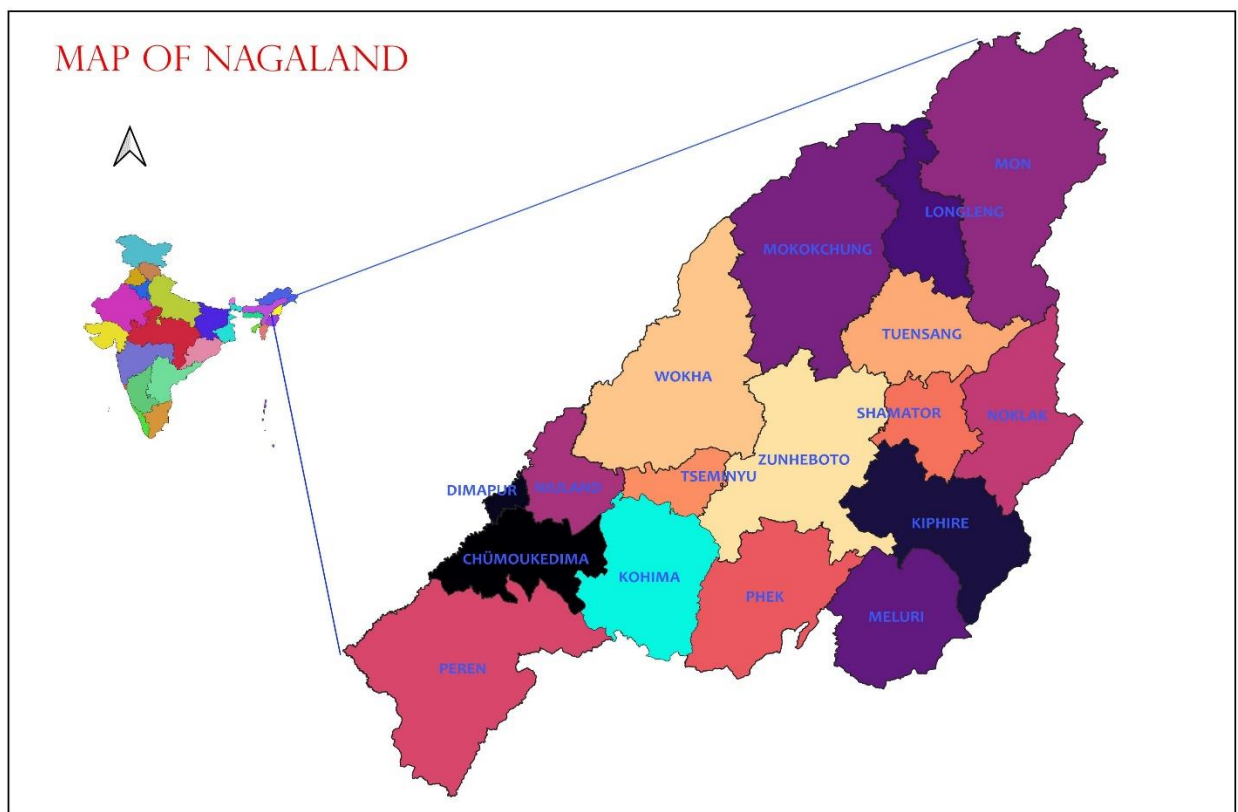


Image: 1.1: The map of Nagaland.

Source: Arranged by Petevilie Khatsü

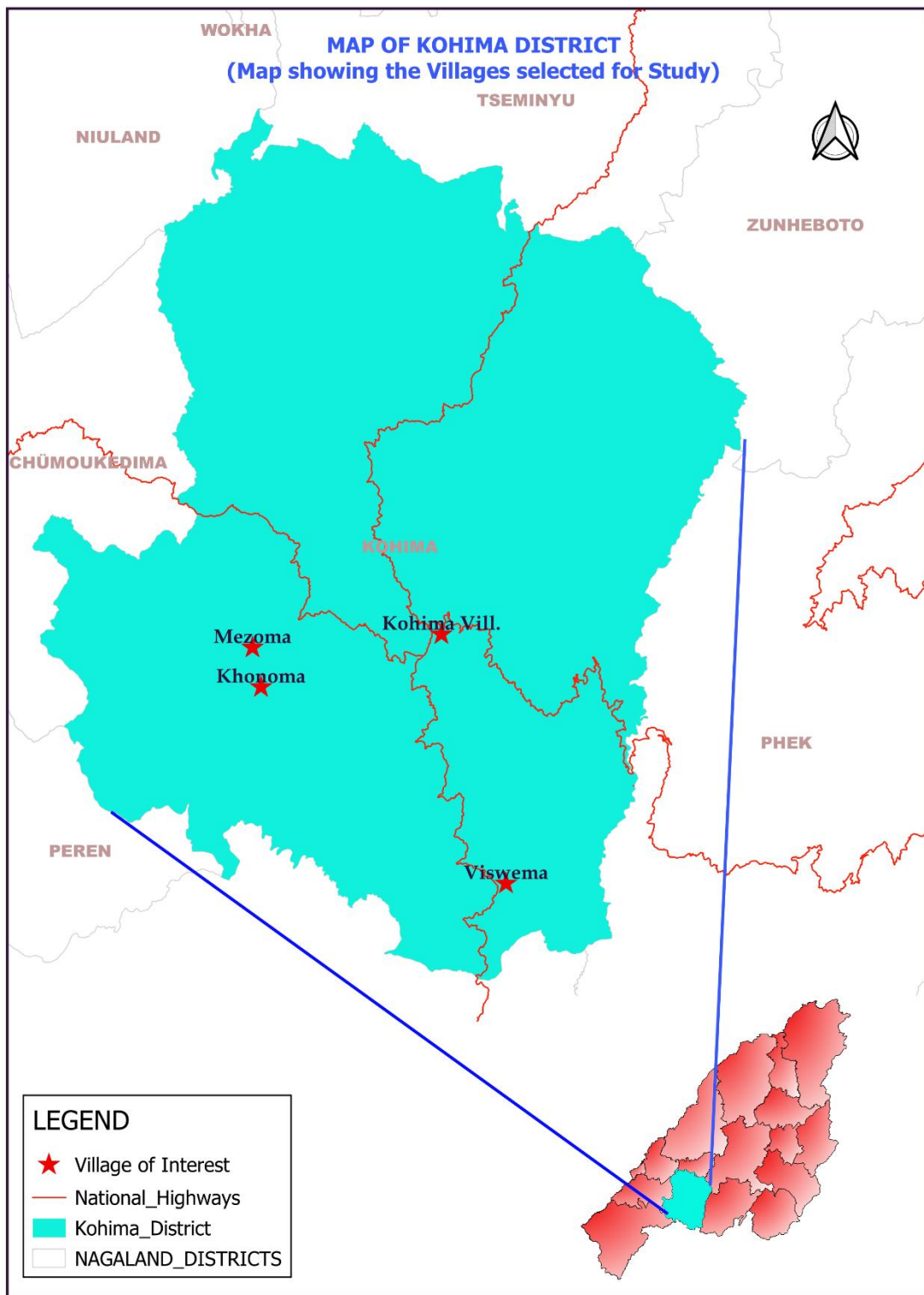


Image 1.2: Selected villages for study.

Source: Arranged by Petevilie Khatsü

### **1.11 Engaging with the field: Some problems and challenges**

Doing research on social reality, one can never be sure of what will happen next and as the fieldwork progressed, the researcher becomes more aware of what Anand Chakravarti said, “fieldwork is a personal experience for it involves close interaction with the subjects of one’s research. Every fieldworker has therefore to arrive with the subjects at his own equation with his informants. There can be no clear-cut, prescribed formula for handling any given field situation, for each situation is unique” (Chakravarti, 2002, p. 38). It is to be noted that the researcher engaged with the field guided by selected research techniques however, the manner in which they are used and the yielded results depend on how the researcher is able to establish rapport with the informant. Therefore, fieldwork is an amalgam of methodological rigour and the unpredictable consequences of the personality of the observer (cited in Chakravavarti, 2002, p. 38).

The researcher had to tactfully allot the schedule of the interviews accordingly. In accordance to the convenience of the informant’s time, which mostly depends on their profession, the interview had to be scheduled. Most of the informants are farmer and they are usually engaged in their field work throughout the year, so the researcher avoided the busy seasons and targeted the festive days or Sundays when they are relaxed and can give their time. The interview on each informant usually last for 2-3 hours or sometimes longer, so, it is important for the research to consider the convenient time of the informants. It goes the same for the government employees, however they usually prefer to be interviewed in the evening or do telephonic interview. As for the people who worked in the church ministry, the interview usually takes place in their work place, i.e. the church. For them, the interview is done during the day time, since they usually are engaged in the morning and evening.

It is notable to mention that accessing the research site especially Kohima village was difficult in comparison to the other villages. Because of the size and population of the village, initially the researcher found it difficult to locate the entry point. This was added with rejection, excuses or ignored calls whenever the potential respondents were approached. It makes the researcher wonders whether the cold treatment is because of being a native researcher, ‘my people’ ‘do not perceive the investigator as special, exotic or powerful’ (cited in Mascarenhas-Keyes 2004, p. 421). After numerous attempts and despite the frustration, the researcher was able to located one of the village goan bura who

proves to be very helpful. The position he occupies came to the aid in locating and contacting the next informants. Subsequently, the other recommended informants were successfully located.

Language proved to be an immense advantage in the course of doing fieldwork as an insider removing the possibility of altering the flow of social interaction (Unluer, 2012). The researcher being acquainted with Tenyidie<sup>1</sup> (the common language spoken by the Angami) and though aware that there were inter-village dialect differences, was adamant that an interpreter will not be required. However, such was not the case and the assumption was proved to be wrong especially after the first visit to Viswema village. It has come to the researcher's realisation that not every villager can speak the common Angami language. The dialect of Viswema village though not completely unintelligible to the researcher, sometimes becomes difficult to keep up when the informant narrates a lengthy experience. In such cases, the researcher had to pause the conversation in between and let the field assistant interpret for both the interviewer and the interviewee. In this case, the accommodation of the researcher played an important role in mitigating this issue. In the initial stage of fieldwork to Viswema village, the researcher prefers to stay in a guesthouse considering the thought of not wanting to be an unnecessary burden to the potential host, besides, the space and leisure time she will be deprived of. However, beside one time, the researcher stayed with an acquaintance for the other visits. The researcher did not realise it initially but staying at the house of an acquaintance actually proves to be quite helpful for the researcher. Trivial as it might appear to be but having small chit chat and the kitchen talks with the mother of the house helped the researcher to get accustomed with the Viswema's dialect.

It is also important to note that when it comes to interviewing the adherents of *Krīna*, unlike the Christians, is different. In the sense that, there are certain protocols the researcher has to follow. Whenever the researcher set to observe and study the festivals and rituals, the researcher has to keep a track and make advance inquiry when she can come. This is because the village as a ritual site and the researcher being an outsider is forbidden to enter the village and their home once the ritual has started. Even during the time of *Sekrenyi* festival, the informant kept on reminding the researcher that she has to

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<sup>1</sup> Tenyidie language is basically adapted from various dialects by the American missionaries and got standardized over time. See also Liezietsu 'Ura Academy and the evolution of Tenyidie' (2009, p. 1-10).

come one day ahead before the inaugural ritual of the festival starts else it will be a taboo for her to enter the village. In such cases, the researcher is mindful not to breach the rules and make sure she reaches the village beforehand and let the informant be aware of her presence.

When it comes to the *Krüna* adherents, they were hesitant to be interviewed giving the reason that they are not in a position to describe all the rituals and practices of *Krüna*. And that it will be more apt for the researcher to approach someone who will be more in tune with the details of the rituals and practices. For which they all pointed to a particular person, who is in a way more like the mouthpiece of the *Krüna* adherent to all the interviews that come. Their reluctance could be the apprehension to give out wrong information to a researcher. It has been observed that they have the tendency to direct the researcher to just look at the monolith by the pathway and note down the rituals inscribed on it. As if the researcher can understand what those ritual means by scanning through it. In such situations, the researcher looked for a way to convince them into conversation and for which having an informal conversation ease them to open up. The researcher keeping in mind of their concern, the interview was proceeded enquiring their daily lived experiences. This has helped the researcher to delve into their beliefs and practices in the present time.

Doing research in religion, the gender of the researcher becomes a disadvantage at times. In the sense that there are rituals specifically for man to perform and on such day, woman is totally prohibited to mingle with man and even to visit the ritual place. In such case, the researcher is left with no option but to stay back and listen after it gets done. Once, the researcher was recommended to send a man along with the informant who is going to perform the ritual and do a visual recording for her. The researcher thought it is a good idea but seeing the hesitation of other male members to carry out the task the researcher holds back. Their hesitation is also reasonable because for this particular ritual, the *Krüna* male members has to wake up before dawn and go to a spring well which is some distance away from the village. To wake up this early on a cold December, unless it is for one's belief or for a research purpose with the commitment of a researcher, it is only fair to savour the luxury of sleep till the sunrise.



### **1.11.1 The problems of overfamiliarity**

Carrying out the research work as a native researcher has its perks as well as its own share of apprehension. As M. N. Srinivas said, the “studies of one’s own society, admittedly difficult, can be done well or badly just as studies of other societies” (Srinivas, 2004, p. 418). According to Bonner and Tullhurst, one of the key advantages of being an insider-researcher is having a greater understanding of the culture being studied (cited in Unluer, 2012). They know how to best approach people. Therefore, the researcher’s position has enabled her to gain access and established rapport with the community. However, this very position is also subjected to biasness which the researcher grapple with. The problem of familiarity which can lead to a loss of an objectivity (ibid.). Chophy in his study on Sumi community as a native researcher talks about the problems of ‘overfamiliarity’ (Chophy, 2019, p. 40). There is the tendency to trivialise certain important social processes, while magnifying certain social events. The researcher also faced the problem of these biases which has to be confronted and resolve during the whole course of research activity and writing process. In this case, to grapple with the dilemma adopting an empathic stance while describing the social reality and acknowledging the reflexive dimension of the researcher process and infusing it into the narrative (ibid.).

### **1.12 Reflexivity in religious studies**

Another concern is the problem of achieving objectivity in religious studies. J. Troisi, in his study on the religious beliefs of the Santhals, says that a danger, which the sociologist of religion faces in studying a primitive or tribal religion, is that his religious and cultural background may come in the way, interpreting the people’s beliefs not by a reference to their own mental life but by reference to his own (Troisi, 1979, p. 19).

The researcher being raised and socialised in a conservative Baptist Christian household is aware that her personal commitment may unconsciously affect her perspective on religion, which may pose a problem at the level of methodology and interpretation. From a social scientific perspective, values can influence the topics sociologist choose to study and the questions they ask, but they should not affect the data collection, analysis or conclusions that are drawn (Roberts & Yamane, 2012, p. 22-23). In this light, the work of Hufford (2005) who talks about incorporating reflexivity into religious studies has been taken into consideration. He said through reflexivity, we become aware of our awareness

and we reflect on our reflection. He said that in the study of spiritual beliefs, the political interest of the scholarly community and those of believers are substantially different and, in some respect, antagonistic. These differences arise from both personal and social characteristics of scholars, and they frequently produce interest that conflict with the interest of those we study. It is important to acknowledge that such differences exist and are substantial. To mitigate this problem, scholars of religion must recognise two set of rules – personal voice and scholarly voice. When a scholar presents findings that are congenial to her or his own personal views, there is the possibility that those views have unduly influenced the inquiry. Hidden bias is controlled by having many points of views and many kinds of interest within the inquiring community, not forbidding a particular set of views and interests (Hufford, 2005, p. 301). Similarly, Troisi also said that it is important for the researcher to not merely rely on his observation but always take into account the explanation given by the people themselves (Troise, 1979).

### **1.13 Chapter Schematisation**

The thesis comprised of six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the research problem, theoretical framework, literature review, objectives and research questions. Subsequently, the chapter discuss the methodology, challenges and the problem of reflexivity in religious studies. Next comes a brief outline of the thesis chapters.

The second chapter attempt to locate and define Angami indigenous religion within the discourse of indigenous religion. The chapter also gives a detail account of the various aspects of religious beliefs and practices to get an understanding of Angami indigenous religion. 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 provides a historical account of the coming of Christianity. The chapter explores the various contention issues and the negotiation strategy between the Christians and the adherents of *Krüna* in the colonial period and in present times. Focusing on the theme of *genna* and the festival of *Sekrenyi*, this chapter examines how the adherents of *Krüna* and the Christians are negotiating their position and at the same time changing the nature of the religious practices.

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 conversion stories of many late converts 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 stories is conversion resulting from the inability to meet the expansive and meticulous demands of their indigenous beliefs and practices.

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 has placed them in a position to negotiate and forge a distinct Naga identity separate from Christianity and Hinduism. The chapter argues that though *Krüna* adherents were able to adapt with the given challenges, the space for them to mobilise an identity on a larger scale is very limited in comparison to other religious reform movements.

The sixth chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings of all the chapters.

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