

CHAPTER 3

KRÜNA AND CHRISTIANITY: CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION

3.1 Introduction

As the researcher navigates her way through Viswema village to meet the informants, she walked pass a multipurpose Angami traditional house-like structure which serve as a stage when big events are organised, decorated with spears, a man's traditional head gear and women carrying basket holding a gourd stuffed with a cotton imitating the foam of rice beer hung on each side of the front post and a big banner covering the background wall of the stage written Zheri Student's Union 42nd General Conference, 2021. After walking for a few blocks, a small group of men in every corner can be seen engaged in slaughtering pigs for the most awaited festival of the year for the Christians, i.e., Christmas. On reaching the targeted place, Yose Chaya is sitting outside his house and dedicatedly manoeuvring a traditional decorative head-gear to be worn for the *sekrenyi* ceremonial possession which is going to be observed after the next two days. December, being considered as one of the most happening months in Nagaland, one can notice a whole lot of activities going on in this village, as every member of the community gets involved, irrespective of being a Christian or *Krünamia* (adherent of *Krüna*).

On the surface, this scene paints a picture of a mutual coexistence between the Christians and the *Krünamia*. However, the seemingly harmonious coexistence cloaks layers of contestations and negotiations between practitioners of the two religious beliefs that informs social life in the village.

Religion is recognised to be one of the important contributing factors in societal integration. It ensures societal cohesion and stability by imparting important values and norms to its members. However, the integration of a society is never complete; tension and conflict are constant possibilities in a society (Bock, 1966). As McGuire argued, religion is one way of expressing the unity of the 'in-group' in against 'out-group', which results to conflict. This distinction implies distancing oneself from outsiders. Just as religious rituals celebrate the identity and unity of the group, they simultaneously maintain the boundary between that group and outsiders (McGuire, 2012, p. 215). Conflict and tension arise when there is a clash of ideology between two different cultures (Copley, 2011).

Tension and conflict between official religion and folk religion also arises when the former do not incorporate the belief and practices of the latter which are believed to be sacred and significant to the maintenance of the group (Bock, 1966).

Drawing from these theoretical formulations, this chapter highlights the interaction between the Christian faith, particularly the variant of American Baptist Christianity, and the indigenous religion among the Nagas, with particular emphasis on the Angami Nagas. The first part of the chapter deals with the American Missionaries and their evangelising strategies. The second part focuses on how the *Krīna* adherents perceived the message of Christianity and the theme of contention that characterised the early encounters with Christianity. The third part deals with negotiation strategies adopted by both faiths. And lastly, focusing on the festival of *sekrenyi*, the study will delve into the nature of negotiation in more recent times.

3.2 A brief history on the advent of Christianity

The monolith erected on the occasion of the Khedi Baptist Centenary Jubilee declares the baptism of Rev. Sieliezhü Sorhie on August 30, 1885, as the event laid down the foundation of Khedi Baptist Church. The day of his baptism marked a crucial event not only for the Khedi Baptist church but also for the Angamis among whom Christian missionaries had a rough beginning. The Baptism of early Christians such as Rev. Sieliezhü Sorhie also marked a turning point for the missionaries who tasted the fruit of their hard work and perseverance after a long dry spell¹. Christianity has come a long way since then with the state celebrating 150 years of Christianity in 2022, one can only pass a conjecture on whether Mary Mead Clark will now wish to retrieve or stand by what she commented on the Nagas when she and her husband, E.W. Clark, came to the Naga Hills back in the nineteenth century to spread the good news, she commented “the Nagas, once civilized and Christianized, will make a manly, worthy people” (Clark, 1907, p. 45).

¹ Four Angamis were baptised by Rev. C.D. King in 1885, Sieliezhü Sorhie was one of them (ABCC 125 years' souvenir).



Image 3.1: Monolith of Khedi Baptist Church centenary jubilee

Source: Fieldwork, Kohima Village

The history of Christianity goes back to the time when colonial British established its rule over the Assam Valley with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), followed by the discovery of the potential for tea plantation. However, along with the establishment of political and economic control, came the problem of constant ‘raid’ from the Hills’ people like the Nagas, Garos and Khasis against the encroacher. To counter these raids, the British carried out not less than 10 military expeditions into the Naga Hills from 1830s to 1880s to prevent the Nagas from damaging their investments in the tea plantations but without much success. Therefore, alongside military incursion, it was considered essential that efforts be made to ‘humanise’ and civilise these ‘savage races’, so that they may become ‘disciplined’ and obedient subjects of the colonial empire (Thomas, 2016, p.13). As a result, with the burden to ‘go teach all nations’ the gospel, the American Baptist missionaries at the invitation of captain Francis Jenkin first arrived in the Naga Hills in the 1830s.

The pioneer among the American Baptist missionaries was Rev. Miles Bronson who made the first contact with the Nagas for the Assam mission. In 1840, Miles Bronson established

a mission station among the Nocte Nagas living in the low hills to the south of Sibsagar district in Assam. Besides, he also prepared a spelling book and a catechism in Naga language. Though his work was cut short because of his sister Rhoda's demise, he laid the ground work for the next missionary to takeover.

After 1842, the missionary activity in the Naga Hills was first resumed by Godhula Brown, an Assamese evangelist and a school teacher who work alongside the American missionary E.W. Clark. He established the first church in 1872 at Deka Haimong (present day Molungkimong) in Ao area.

E.W. Clark continued the Baptist mission when he first arrived to Sibsagar in 1862. Clark achieved early success when the hill men took a fascination on their printing press and the schoolhouse and apparently, a chief among the hill men invite him to come up to their village in the hills and teach their children to 'talk with the books'. Escorted by 60 Naga warriors, Mr. Clark made his first journey into the Naga Hills in 1872 (Clark, 1907, p. 13). In 1876, he established the Naga mission in its own right, rather than as a branch of Assam mission. Due to the opposition from within and other villagers over the presence of a white man with strange beliefs who was also suspected to be an agent of the government, Clark decided to form a new village called Molung (present day Molungyimsen) with the small following of Christian converts. Molung remained the centre for Baptist mission work in the Eastern Naga Hills until 1894, when the centre was shifted to Impur (Pruett, 1974).

Meanwhile, in 1879, C.D. King set out to open a mission field in Kohima, but due to the Angami uprising against the British in 1879, it was only in 1881 that the mission work was taken up, after the Nagas accepted the British rule over them (Linyü, 2004, p. 68). After C.D. King left in 1886, S.W. Rivenburg and his wife took over the Kohima mission in 1887. Another mission centre was started at Wokha, among the Lothas. It was established by W.E. Witter in 1885.

3.2.1 Missionaries and their evangelising strategies

The American missionaries came to the Naga Hills with the sole purpose to give the people the gospel as Rev. Sidney Rivenburg on reaching Kohima said "the Angami people shall be my people, and my one work shall be to make my God their God" (ABCC 125 years Souvenir, 2010). Their objective was to rescue the perishing, give the good news and save

as many souls as possible. Braving all perils, the missionaries took the task of evangelising the ‘savage’ and ‘wild’ Nagas as their responsibility to draw them out of ‘darkness into light’. The missionaries carried out their work through itinerant preaching tours, establishment of schools, standardization of local language, translation and printing, bible studies, prayer meetings, worship services, and societies, and medical work. The missionaries also organised conferences and the topics they preached about were evangelization, with concerns such as, shall the Nagas bury their dead? Should all Christian learn to read? By what changes in food, houses, sanitation, and clothing shall Christian better their mode of living? (Clark, 1907, p. 143). Thus, along with the new religion, the missionaries also introduced a ‘Christian way of life’, a new way of life that was intended to differentiate the Christians from the non-Christians (Mepfhü-o, 2016). This construction of a new religious ‘self’ in opposition with the existing ‘Naga self’ was possible through a subtle process of evangelisation. John Thomas called this a ‘hegemonic project’ (Thomas, 2016, p. 29).

Setting the impression: Not to take but come to give

It is interesting to note that when the missionaries set foot in the Naga Hills, they projected their mission in contrast to the British government. The government being associated with violence in the hills, the arrival of missionaries was not without suspicions which created fear amongst the Nagas. The missionaries were therefore careful to set a friendly tone towards the Nagas. When Rev. Miles Bronson, the first missionary to the Nagas, wrote about the climate of suspicion in which he was first received by the Nagas; “they feared that I was a servant of the company, come to spy out their roads, sources of wealth, number of slaves, amount of population, and means of defence, and the best methods of taking the country” (BMM, 1839, p. 283). In the 1870s when Mr. Godhula began his missionary work among the Ao Nagas, he was held captive by the people in Dekha Haimong village suspecting that he was ‘a spy of the company’ (Clark, 1907, p. 11). It was thus imperative for the missionaries to let the Nagas understand that they came in peace. Rev. Bronson assured the chiefs with good wishes and good intentions and make it clear in the beginning that “it was my intention to take nothing from them” (BMM, 1839, p. 284). To gain the favour of the people he even presented useful articles that he brought, without which ‘I should have been considered extremely disrespectful’. Seeing the kind gesture of the missionary, the Nagas were reported to appear much pleased. (BMM, 1839, p. 283). And

eventually, the ‘sweet gospel hymn’ and ‘sweet old story’ were able to ‘soften’ the ‘hard hearts’ of the Nagas (Clark, 1907, p. 11).

Respectful, kind, hospitable...anything but wild with no religion

The missionaries were called to missionize the wild tribes inhabiting the Naga Hills. The villagers received Rev. Bronson kindly and even gifted him with a ‘large pig and salt’. He saw that the Nagas were generously hospitable and came to meet him ‘in a very respectable manner’ (BMM, 1839, p. 282). However, the Nagas still appears to be ‘rude and wild as the untamed beast’ (BMM,1839, p. 284), because they still have not adopted any form of religion. He found them extremely ignorant that they have no priest, no houses of worship, and no favourite creed. For the missionary, the Nagas are ‘savage’ in war but under the sweet influence of Christianity, they would make them a ‘most amiable’ and ‘interesting people’ (BMM, 1840, p. 320).

The feet that bring the good news

Preaching is considered as the foremost aim of the missionary and it was done through the itinerant tours to nearby villages by the missionary and also by sending out trained local evangelist to preach in far areas (Thomas, 2016, p. 29). The missionary pursued the people to leave their ‘sinful life’ and taught them how to love God. In learning that the thought of dying scares the people most, Rev. Bronson taught the people about the ‘great book God has given to guide all men’ and that if they believed and obeyed it, they would be ‘happy at the thought of dying’ (BMM, 1839, p. 286). In order to make their message more appealing and effective the missionary used bible picture and rolls. They also preached the gospel with the help of equipment like gramophone and the magic lantern, which created much excitement among the villagers (Thomas, 2016, p. 30).

Becoming a ‘reading people’

Christianity and education went hand in hand. Education has been by far the most successful entry point for the American Baptist missionaries into the alien cultures that they sought to evangelised. Through education the missionaries were able to insinuate in the natives ‘a new way of viewing the world’ (Chophy, 2021, p. 33). As Rev. Bronson started establishing his mission work in the Naga Hills, he set to learn their language,

engage in book translation and to make the ‘tribes become a reading people’ (BMM, 1840, p. 216). With the financial support from the British, he set up a school which was simultaneously used as ‘a place of worship’ (BMM, 1841, p. 86). The establishment of school is considered as a ‘great triumph over Naga prejudice’ and over the force of ‘long established customs’ (BMM, 1841, p. 87). School education became the most effective means to inculcate the ‘Christian truth’. Gradually, primary schools were established in different villages; high schools in the mission stations like Kohima, Ukhrul, Impur; teacher-training institutes in mission stations like Impur and Kohima; Bible schools and theological colleges to train evangelists and pastors in Jorhat (Thomas, 2016).

Healing the sick

Providing modern medical service was another integral part of the missionary’s evangelising strategies. Along with itinerant preaching tours, the missionary also provided medical treatment to the sick people which actually proved to be quite effective in gaining the attention, trust and sympathy of the people. Trained medical missionaries like Sydney Rivenburg toured around the villages to vaccinate the people, especially during times of epidemic and illness. According to Thomas, this act of healing was intended to demonstrate the proof of God’s power over the ‘unhealthy’ and ‘unclean’ existence of the Nagas (Thomas, 2016, p. 41).

Cleanliness is next to godliness

The missionaries also made efforts to inculcate the principles of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘hygiene’ seeing the ‘unhygienic’ environment and ‘unsanitary’ habits of the Nagas. For the missionaries, the dirt that covers a Naga reflected the deterioration of their moral and spiritual state. Therefore, maintaining clean bodies, homes, food and environment was impressed upon the Nagas so that they may become clean and healthy Christians (Thomas 2016, p. 44). The missionaries emphasised on sanitising the villages, draining all the swamp and pools as a precautionary step to deter the spread of malaria. Efforts were made to increase windows for light and ventilation. Besides, Sydney Rivenburg also translated a school textbook on the rudiments of hygiene and classes on the subject were included as part of the school curriculum (ibid.).

Clothing the heathen

The sartorial sense of the Nagas was another ground where the missionary tried to insinuate the evangelical notion of modesty. For the missionaries, not only was the body of a Naga an embodiment of dirt and disorder but even the clothing that covered their body was far from what the missionary understood to be ‘decent’, dignified or even healthful (Thomas, 2016, p. 43). As the missionaries carried out their mission to evangelise the ‘savage’ tribes, they regarded the festivals as ‘heathen’ festival and derided the local attires of the Nagas as nothing but ‘exhibitions of taste so degrading and repulsive’ (Clark, 1907, p. 54). The missionaries advocated the abandonment of ornaments and Naga clothing. They proposed that Christian men should adopt dhoti cloth, khaki shorts, coats, and sari and blouses for women. Mary Mead Clark mentioned about the adoption of Assamese costume of jacket and body cloth by the pupils in the school while lamenting that ‘the habits of the older ones are still as the laws of the Medes and Persians’ (Clark, 1907, p. 54). Therefore, clothing became an important marker of being identified as a Christian in which the American evangelicals gave to clothes as a marker of distinction between the ‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’ (Thomas, 2016, p. 45).

3.3 Relationship between the British and Christian missionaries

The commencement of the missionary work among the Naga tribes was largely made possible with the mediation of the colonial state as they saw in it a ‘pacifying’ enterprise (Thomas, 2016, p. 21). They are of two separate entities with different motives but their differences do not come in their way when in need of rendering support to each other. The British provide security and protection for the missionaries as they set to penetrate the Naga Hills popularly known and feared for the practice of headhunting. Moreover, the abolishment of headhunting by the British military made it safer for the missionary to travel freely. The British government also give financial support to the missionaries to set up schools, a monthly grand-in-aid for school maintenance and grants for the printing of bible translations and school books. On the other hand, the missionary rich experience and knowledge on the local people proved to be indispensable for the British administrators in their policy making. So much so that “the colonial officials considered the missionary as an extension of their administrative apparatus in the Hills” (Thomas, 2016, p. 26). However, there was a shift in attitude by the later phase of the 20th century. The colonial bureaucrats and anthropologists became vocal opponents of the cultural transformation

propagated by the missionaries and showed their concern towards the preservation of their traditional practices (Mills, 1926; Haimendorf, 1939; Hutton, 1969; Elwin, 1969).

3.4 Resisting the new faith

Scholars have argued that Christianity did not completely eradicate the socio-cultural practices of the Nagas, rather Christianity was accepted by the people only when the message was localized depicting the fluidity of their religious beliefs and practices (Pruet, 1974; Joshi 2012; Zhimo, 2015; Angelova 2017; Chophy 2019)². And that Naga Christianity is typically Naga in character (Kikhi, 2009). However, in the initial stage, Christianity was bitterly opposed by the non-Christians as they felt that this new religion associated with the white people had come to disrupt their harmonious life. Drawing from the African context, the Igbo people refusal to convert was the fear that their gods will bring disaster to them, and the other reason was that the missionaries wanted to destroy their culture (Okeke et al, 2017). Similarly, this fear of *terhuomia* (loosely translated as spirits) had a strong hold in a Nagas's psyche and formed the very base of their religiosity. Though, missionaries and Naga Christian claimed that the Nagas readily accepted Christianity because their religiosity was open and sensitive to religious beliefs (Imchen, 1993; Pongen, 2016), conversion was neither a smooth process nor was it readily accepted. Initially, it was received by acts of resistance. The conversion of the people began to draw differences between the convert and the non-convert. As Mary Clark observed, 'The village was divided regarding this new order of thing' and the 'adherents of the old, cruel faith' sees the missionaries as an agent of the company and feared that the 'gospel of peace and love would rapidly empty their skull houses and put to rout most of the old customs handed down from forefathers, for whom they held the greatest reverence' (Clark, 1907, p. 17).

The real objection to the missionary and his activities came subsequently, when the newly converts, in the name of the new religion became indifferent towards meeting their customary social and economic obligations towards their community; refused to participate in and contribute to the ceremonial practices and festivities that were integral to the spiritual, social and economic integrity of the village community and openly

² Also see Pachuau's *Why do people convert? Understanding conversion to Christianity in Mizoram* (2019).

desecrated and ridiculed objects and ceremonies that most people in their community held to be sacred (Haimendorf, 1939). 'Hostility to the new religion waxed stronger and stronger' when the Christians refuse to join the village in warfare expedition, citing the incompatibility with the underlying Christian virtue of love and peace (Clark, 1907, p. 17-18).

The expensive sacrifices which were performed to secure the favour of the spirits were also expensive affairs that impoverished the people. It became a notable reason for the Nagas to convert (Clark, 1907, Zhimo, 2015). Subsequently, the converts were dissuaded to participate in village festivities like 'feast of merit' since it involved excessive consumption of rice beer which went against the strict teetotalism the missionaries preached about and certain ceremonial practices the missionaries considered 'unchristian' and 'heathen' (Thomas, 2016, p. 53). The converts' refusal to participate in the ceremonial practices which served as a social and economic functions caused much dissension within the village.

The newly converts were strictly forbidden to drink liquor and indulge in any drunken behaviour. *Zu* (rice beer) bearing ritual significance, was one of the main reasons why the converts were forbidden to part take in festivals. The advocacy of teetotalism led to a sharp demarcation among the drinker and non-drinker, which came to signify Christian and non-Christian respectively (Mepfhü-o, 2016). Christians were asked to drink only tea. On the other hand, the non-Christian taunted the Christian with names and called them *cienhenyü be kekrieko* meaning 'the people who drank boiled leaf' (Chiechama Baptist Church Centenary Souvenir, 2010). The non-Christian also refuses to associate or eat food cooked from the same pot fearing that they will be defiled since the Christians do not observe *genna* like the *Krüna* people do.

In *Krüna* religion, it is a taboo for an unmarried woman to grow her hair. A shaven head is a sign of purity. The grown hair of an unmarried women is regarded as *kemetho tha* literally meaning 'meaningless hair'. This practise became a case of contention between the convert and the *Krünamia*. During the initial year of Christianity, the convert unmarried women were not exempted from this practice. They were strictly warned not to grow their hair. And this was recorded in BCJ souvenir that since, she is not allowed to grow her hair in the village, the young maiden will go to a neighbouring village and stay there for five days, grow her hair and come back to her village (Baptist Church Jotsoma Souvenir, 2005,

p. 22). This action breached the principles of *genna* and hence, offended the *Krūnamia*. For this, Pudusal Pucho³ said in the early years of Christianity in Viswema village, the unmarried woman who got converted and started to grow their hair was made to exit the village gate during village rituals and festival. Only after her exit, her family can initiate the ritual for *sekrenyi*. This is because she breached a taboo and her very presence was a defilement to the *Krūnamia*.

Another problem emerged in regard to the observation of *genna* which required the involvement of every villager to completely abstain from work and nobody should violate the ceremony by leaving or coming inside the village on that day. But the Christians believed that they were different people who no longer has anything to do with ancient custom of any kind (Zhimo, 2015), thereby refused to observe it and instead observe and promote their own specific day of abstinence in the week, the Sabbath or Sunday (Thomas, 2016, p. 53).

Cases on conflict between the Christians and *Krūna* adherents were also reflected in the field data collected from Kohima village. In the words of Neilakuolie Yiese⁴, there was a time when a heavy storm caused landslide and destroyed the paddies of the Kohima village. The *Krūna* followers blamed an early convert that the calamity was a result of him working on *dzūivala*⁵. But he responded that his action was not intended to stir a calamity, since he as well have started his work invoking a prayer to God. A fight broke and as a result, the *Krūna* adherents reprimanded him and he was not allowed to cultivate his paddy for some years since his action have compromised the wellbeing of the community. Another case was on the day of *dzūthukiva penie*⁶, the Christians made fire before sunrise which was a taboo in *Krūna* belief. The Christians' action was considered as blasphemy to the *genna*, so they were made to say the blessing words⁷ to revoke their action. Hence, the converts refusal to abide by the *genna* which is essential for the well-being of the

³ Pucho is a church deacon, got converted in 1976. Interviewed on 21st December 2021, Viswema village.

⁴ Neilakuolie Yiese, Kohima village. A former deacon in Khedi Baptist Church.

⁵ On this day it is taboo to work in the field. Defying the taboo means storms will destroy the paddy.

⁶ It is a taboo to make fire before sunrise before the mother in the family observe a ritual, she will fetch water and dip the leaf of wormwood into the water and sprinkle it over the house post as a sign to ward off any possibilities of calamities that can be caused by fire.

⁷ Blessing words - *a mitho la uramia bu suota kenyü, keviu chü morosuo* meaning, God forbid misfortune shall not befall on our village because of my action, it shall be well.

community, has begun to pose a challenge as it comes in the way of the existing religious belief, fear that such action has provoked the *terhuomia* and will invite mishaps.

3.5 ‘Christian vs Ancient’: The case of *genna*

Genna (comprises of *nanyü*, *penie* and *kenyü*) as a form of religious expression is sacred to the community. There is no question of defying it, which according to the *Krüna* belief, *terhuomia* will otherwise incur misfortune upon the community and undermine its wellbeing. The observation of *genna* has become a case of contention between Christians and non-Christians which at times requires the intervention of colonial court to settle the disputes. These conflicts were recorded in colonial courts from around 1890s till 1945 and registered as ‘Christian vs. Heathen’ or ‘Christian vs Ancient’.

The Christians refused to make contributions to the religious festivals or pay fees to the religious priests. ‘This refusal has led to persecution and appeals to the officials’ (Smith, 1925 p. 190). American sociologist, W.C. Smith in his monograph, *The Ao Nagas*, records that in such cases the Christians were exempted from the contribution but were ‘compelled to observed the eight most important rest days in the year’ (cited in Smith, 1925, p. 190). In the case of Goa, it was the Hindus who were force to leave the village at the cost of losing their property and land else staying in village means they have to convert to Christianity (Robinson, 2004). While for the Nagas, the Christians were given the option to choose either to settle in the new Christian village without the prevalence of religious ceremonies, if not, it was made compulsion for the Christians who stays back in the village to observe a ‘reasonable number of *amungs*’⁸ (Mills, 1926, p. 407). As a result of the convert not conforming to the observation of *genna* days, a new ‘Christian village’ called Molungyimsen was established by E.W. Clark. ‘The new village was formed without the accustomed heathen ceremonies to propitiate demons by great and expensive sacrificial offerings. It was determined to abandon aggressive warfare and to be known as a peaceful, ‘Christian village’ (Clark, 1907, p. 24). In the African context, Kieran defines Christian villages as settlement founded by Christian missionaries so that the converts could live and work in a Christian environment outside the normal life of the people of the region where such villages were located (Clark, 1971). In the case of Africa, the Christian village

⁸ Ao *genna*.

is composed of those freed slaves who had been ransomed by the missionaries and eventually by default they become Christians.

Similarly, in the Angami village of Ciechama, as a result of conflict, the non-Christians imposed the Christians with 17 *genna* (Chiechama Baptist Centenary Souvenir, 2010). In order to keep the Christians under their control the *Krüna* people file a case to the government and list out 17 *genna* that the Christian should also observe these *genna*. In 1928, the government gave the order to the Christian to move outside the village gate and as a result the Christian established a Christian village. However, because of continual dispute between the two religions the then DC of Naga Hills Mr. C.R. Pawsey had to come and draw the boundary between the Christians and the *Krünamia*. The *Krüna* adherents sees that despite the Christians were made to observe only 17 *genna*, it was not stopping the people to convert and move out to the Christian village so they reduce the *genna* to 7. On breaching the principles of *penie*, with the confession of the violator the village priest has to seek blessing as an act of revoking his action which the people believe has offended the *terhuomia*. However, such was not the case when the Christians break the *penie* as seen in Jotsoma village. It was in 1943, a pastor who belongs to a different village, on evangelistic work came to Jotsoma village on a *penie* day which upset the *Krüna* people. As a consequence of him trespassing inside the village he was made to pay rupees 5 to the village (Baptist Church Jotsoma 1905-2005).

As recorded in Kiruphema Baptist Church 1940-2015, in Kiruphema village the agreement made between the two religions was for the Christian to observe 7 significant *genna* in *Krüna*. However, this became inconvenient for the Christians and for which they do not observe the ritual days. This led to conflict between them and on 24 December 1943 they took the case to the G.B of Khonoma Semo Khel, Eno Capusa, his judgement was for the Christian to set a new village outside the village gate and will not observe any *genna* of the *Krüna*. This new established village is known as *kehouko ba*, a seat or place for the church goers, which later came to be known as 'Kiruphema basa'.

The involvement of colonial courts played an integrative role without undermining the religious practices, while at the same time decreeing propositions which will change the very essence of charismatic *nanyü*. The settlement of disputes which arises out of religious differences were also recorded by the Naga Hills Deputy commissioner J.H. Hutton in his

tour dairies. In one of his tours to Khonoma captioned as ‘Christian-Ancient conflicts’, he mentioned

The Christians having gone to the fields on a *genna* day recently, the millet has begun to die mysteriously, though it was looking extremely well before. It is true that something has happened to the millet. It is not a visible insect, but look likes too much sun, which under the circumstances is impossible... The Christians are willing to segregate themselves but not so far as to cross water, and without that there can be no separation of *gennas* say the Ancients. The Christians are also reasonably accommodating in the matter of observing *genna* but wants a definite and explicit list. But on this the Ancients cannot give as the number of days for any given *genna* appears to be exceedingly variable in Khonoma, probably depending on dreams and omens... The Ancients will make a list and they will try to come to an agreement with the Christians. (Hutton tour dairies, 1926)

This categorisation of *genna* with a number attached to what can be considered as ‘important’ and ‘reasonable’ for the sake of settling disputes, more so, for the continual coexistence of two different religions has in a way rationalised the charisma of *genna*. The process of rationalisation has led to what Weber calls ‘the disenchantment of the world’ (Roth, 1978). The nature of *genna* is such that one cannot be sure of the number of *genna* a village has to observe in a year. Depending on the circumstances and the urgency of the given situation, the village priest decides what and when to observe the *genna* and *penie* associated to it. However, Hutton attempting to settle the disputes and demanding a list of *genna* from the *Krüna* adherents, which is not possible, subdued the charisma of *genna* into a predictable list. Rationalising the charisma of *genna* into a predictable list led to the belief that it can be explained by technical means and calculation, hence, disenchanting the nature of *genna*.

It is to be noted that the steps the *Krüna* adherents took was crucial for the coexistence of two different religion. Rowena Robinson says that the Hindus in Goa accepted Catholicism as the only way of preventing their world from falling completely to pieces (Robinson, 2004). Likewise, the *Krüna* though not converting, sees categorising *genna* into ‘17 important’ and later on reduce to ‘7 important’ as a way to hold their world from falling apart.

3.6 Negotiation as a continuous process

As shown in the sections above, *Krüna* and Christianity were opposed to each other in so many ways and such opposition has called for a negotiation. Negotiation appears to present a conducive ground for both the religions to work on their differences which comes with a degree of compromising from both the parties. However, it is far too complex than it seems to be with the given time. Bock says conflict can be muted by compromise. And that a compromise can be attained by the removal of the transcendental reference of the folk item (Bock, 1966). Maaker also talks about the religious differences in Garo Hills where a re-negotiation of rituals is done in times of death. The re-negotiation came out as the Baptist mortuary ritual resembling a Songsarek death ritual while the structure and contents of the Songsarek ritual were modified to suit Baptist beliefs (Maaker, 2007).

Earlier, when Christianity began to mark its presence, the converts did not hesitate to openly defy the religious practices in a zero-tolerance attitude towards the *Krüna* adherents. The intervention of colonial court in the settlement of religious disputes appears to be in the light of a concrete clear-cut solution where the days of *genna* were categorised into what a Christian should follow and not significant enough to not follow, even listing out a definite number of *genna* days to observe. Negotiation was based on where both the parties have to compromise.

Coming to the present scenario, unlike the colonial period, there was no involvement of court to settle their disputes but it does not mean that there is no more friction between the two religions. The more pertinent questions therefore are, could it be because of the increasing number of Christians? Or their changing attitude towards each other or is there more to it? According to Strauss, negotiation is not a fixed set of rules but it appears to be a continuous interaction and negotiation, where individual and groups work together to establish, maintain, and sometimes modify the order that governs their lives (Strauss, 1978). The nature of negotiation as a continuous process is reflected and can be best explained when the celebration of *sekrenyi* and Christmas at Viswema village in 2021 got coincided. What rituals to impose, comply and appropriated by both the *Krünamia* and Christians is reflected on the level of village to *khel* and within the family.

Since the *Krüna* adherents fixed the date of the festival in accordance to the moon's phases, the celebration of *sekrenyi* is usually in the month of December but the days are not fixed

hence can occur on any day. In 2021, *sekrenyi* which is celebrated for 10 days, starting from 21st December, coincided with Christmas. The village decided to do the *sekrenyi* ceremonial procession which was supposed to be on 24th according to the proceeding of festival days. However, the 24th of December, the eve of Christmas is an important and busy day for the Christians to complete the Christmas preparations. So, the *Krüna* people decided to prepone the ceremonial procession a day ahead, i.e., 23rd, the day of the main ritual, the sanctification day. On this day, all the men who are observing the ritual *sekre* are prohibited to mingle with woman or outsiders in fear of defilement of their body. This ritual is for two days and they have to complete the ritual meat before the sun sets and throw away the leftover. The completion of this ritual marks their body as ‘cleaned’ and ‘sacralised’. However, since the Christians are also going to take part in the procession, they make it on the same day of the sacrament day to which Yose Chaya commented that they also have to be considerate of the Christian situation. He maintained that they have been observing the religious practices as it was and with every effort to keep the *Krüna* religion intact but proved otherwise as seen during this *sekrenyi* celebration.

The Christians on the other hand, irrespective of men and women, elder, youth and kids came dressed up in their best traditional attires, even including those from Kohima (capital town which is about 25 kms), as participants and spectators to witness the *sekrenyi* ceremonial procession. Besides, there is also a film crew documenting the procession.

When the time came all the menfolk, from old men to young boys, gathered at the venue. Rice beer have been prepared beforehand and kept it in the middle by the roadside on a *badze*, an alleviated circular resting place built with stones, openly displayed. The women folk waited on the *badze* and filled the traditional container with *zu* which is going to be given to the men whoever wants to drink by the end of the procession irrespective of being Christians or *Krünamia*. *Zu* has ritual significance for the *Krüna* which is used to be sternly opposed by the Christians and its consumption is seen as an attribute of sin. Leading by a *Krünamia* elder the procession begin, following his lead the other menfolk start to *kehu*⁹ in unison. The procession last for an hour and ends with the gunshots and ululate.

⁹ Howling and ululating as they start the procession.



Image 3.2: Womenfolk placing *zu* in traditional pots on a *badze*

Source: Fieldwork, Viswema village

During *sekrenyi*, it is a taboo to fetch water from the spring well for two days, in the belief that such an act will defile the ritual which in turn will invite misfortune. What is seen in Viswema village is that, now, though drinking water is connected to every house through pipelines, which is not from the spring well but river. The taboo of fetching water still prevailed in times of this festival. The *Krüna* followers will go and block the well and pipes with sticks, stones and thorn. So, even the Christian has to observe the taboo for which they have to store enough water to last them for two days, now they have bent the taboo to one day. It is recorded that in 2016, conflict emerged among the villagers, between the *Krüna* adherents and the village chairman and the youth leaders on the other side. The leaders went to remove the blockage but without success, the fear of the consequences for breaking the ritual being a major reason according to a respondent. It is interesting to note that till now the villagers, especially in Pavo and Kirhazou *khel* without questioning, such taboo is followed. While, this taboo is not imposed to the other two *khels* - Zheri and

Rachü¹⁰. And this is because there are people who still follows *Krüna* in Pavo and Kirhazou *khel* while there is no more *Krünamia* in Zheri and Rachü *khel*, everyone in these two *khels* have converted to Christianity. It is apparent that water is use as means to detect the Christians with the rule applicable only in two *khels*.

Within the family circle, the celebration of *Krüna* festival and Christian festival are also taking a different turn now. Thoseno Chüsi¹¹ said, she was the first to convert in her family, so when her family is observing festival rituals, she was made to step outside their house till the completion of the ritual because her presence is considered to be a defilement to the ritual. On the other hand, in 2021, for a family like Yose's, his two sons who are Christians have come with their family from Kohima to celebrate Christmas while he is also at the same time celebrating *sekrenyi* with his other two sons, there seems to be mutual tolerance from both. Yose and his two sons are observing *sekre* and all the rituals are happening at the *kilo* of the house. On the day of the *Sekre*, Yose cooked the ritual chicken while the women in the family are busy in the kitchen getting their husbands ready for the ceremonial procession meanwhile his grandchildren are watching television, a Christmas cartoon show. The dynamics of mutual coexistence is prevalent in this family where the *Krüna* patriarch do not direct the choices and movement of his Christian children. Likewise, his accommodative children reciprocate, celebrating *sekrenyi* with their parents and seen taking part in *sekrenyi* ceremonial procession as well.

¹⁰ There are four *khels* in Viswema village. they are Zheri, Rachü, Pavo and Kirhazou.

¹¹ Thoseno Chüsi is 66 years old and converted at the age of 18. She is a farmer. Mezoma Village, interviewed on 23rd August 2020.



Image 3.3: *Sekrenyi* ceremonial procession, Viswema village.

Source: Fieldwork



Image 3.4: Yose Chaya and his sons, Viswema village.

Source: Fieldwork

The negotiation between *Krüna* and Christianity is not fixed or coercive; rather, it arises through ongoing interaction and negotiation (Strauss, 1978). This is evident during the celebration of *Sekrenyi*, when *Krüna* adherents adjusted the ceremonial procession a day earlier to accommodate Christian participation, allowing a day in between for Christmas preparations. Since *Sekrenyi* is determined by the phases of the moon, its date can vary each year. When it falls near Christmas, the *Krüna* community adjusts the procession accordingly. This process of negotiation is also reflected in family dynamics, where Christian children celebrate *Sekrenyi* with their *Krüna* parents and vice versa during Christmas. For instance, while preparing for the *Sekrenyi* procession, children may watch Christmas cartoons on television. This ongoing negotiation is not based on coercion but is instead a mutual process of interaction and accommodation between the two religions.

When Christianity was first introduced, traditional festivals like *Sekrenyi* were considered part of "savage heathen worship." However, in contemporary times, these festivals are no longer condemned, and Christians now actively participate in the celebrations. The state government has even designated February 25th as *Sekrenyi* Day on the official calendar, organizing events to promote and celebrate the festival. Today, *Sekrenyi* is deeply connected to Naga cultural and ethnic identity. As Longkumer (2019)¹² argues, identity is not a fixed entity but a dynamic one that is reasserted, particularly through festival celebrations. As observed in Viswema village, the participation of villagers from both within and outside the community, such as from Kohima, in the ceremonial procession is a way of reinforcing their collective identity. *Sekrenyi* has evolved beyond a simple occasion for traditional attire and folk songs to become a time for reconciling differences and reaffirming shared identity. Poon (2002) suggests that the persistence and transformation of popular religion does not signify a static relationship between official and popular religion. Instead, it reflects an arena of conflict, fusion, and ongoing negotiation between the state and the common people. In the case of the Angami, this negotiation is a continuous process of tension and accommodation, defined not by coercion but by interaction and mutual understanding.

The next section will show how the Christian Angamis are using tradition as a way to express their religiosity.

¹² See also Mawon's *Continuity and Change in Hao Naga Festivals*. She talks about revived of festival in modified form to protect and assert their Naga identity (2017).

3.7 Harmonizing tradition in the light of Christianity

When it comes to cultural change one cannot ignore the role of the church in insinuating the cultural traditions to the members. Church occupies an important place in the society. The influence of church on the day-to-day life is undeniable and inextricably linked with the larger Naga identity. Nowadays, churches in Nagaland are coming up with programmes such as, ‘cultural Sunday’ corroborating with themes like ‘Our culture in context of Christianity’. In these kinds of Sundays, members are asked to come in their traditional attires and encouraged to sing folk songs. Such programmes are not seen as ‘unchristian’ but considered as otherwise. In the words of Saphrul Pucho¹³, *I saw the Christians burning the traditional attire and destroying the kikia¹⁴ in the belief that all these signifies a sinful life, but now things have changed. Educating ourselves with our traditional practices can make us a better Naga and a better Christian. We, Naga love to sing so, I even proposed in the church especially, in the men’s department that we should organise programmes to sing folksong in the midst of worship service.* Christianity has definitely changed the way a Naga view his/her traditional practices. Rev. Keviyiekielie Linyü¹⁵ also opined that church should organise *thekhra cü¹⁶* since it is the Christian who is upholding its culture. He said that as long as the ritual, which is associated with *Krüna* has been omitted, they can take part in the celebration and can organise the celebration better than the olden times.

The integration of tradition in the light of Christianity was displayed during the celebration of Platinum Jubilee of Mezoma Baptist Church on 18 December 2021. The celebration started with the inauguration of jubilee *kecha badze¹⁷*, blowing horn in unison by two young lads dressed in their traditional attires - shawl, necklace and traditional waist coat

¹³ Saphrul Pucho, Viswema village. He is the Assistant Pastor of Viswema Baptist Church. Interviewed on 22nd December 2021.

¹⁴ Traditional house with house horns, someone who performed feast of merit can construct this kind of house.

¹⁵ Rev. Keviyiekielie Linyü, Kohima village. He is the Pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Kohima. Interviewed on 11th January 2022.

¹⁶ It is a part of celebration especially in the festival of *thekranyi* where the members of each *thesü* comes together in their own group parents’ house and feast on. In some given year, a *thesü* will take the initiative, adorned in their traditional regalia, sit in a circular, singing folk songs and spectators will come and watch them. All these events are a part of *thekracü*, though there can be a slight difference from a village to village.

¹⁷ Prayer altar. *Badze* literally means ‘seats arranged’, is a traditional resting place usually made exclusively with stone (in name of a renowned person).

followed by a prayer. The jubilee choir dressed in their traditional wrap and shawl enthralled the congregation with the jubilee song which has a touch of folk tune followed by the congregation ululating and singing the Hallelujah chorus. The women's department adorned in their *herei*¹⁸ shawl and *mhoshü*¹⁹ wrapper sung a folksong for which they received applaud from the congregation for their soulful melodious voice moreover, keeping the tradition alive on such auspicious occasion. In regard to this, the church Pastor²⁰ commented *when the chairperson of the women's department came and enquired, if they can sing a folksong with lyrics in tune with Christianity as the older generation women cannot sing if it is staff notation hymn. I couldn't make out the lyrics as they sang but it ends with '...Hallelluyah, Jihova tsheliecie' (Hallelluyah, praise the Lord). So, it is a good thing that they incorporate and amalgamate folk tune with Christian lyrics.* What can be constructed from this scene is that the church while not wavering away from the Christian beliefs insinuate a sense of belonging to the members through traditions, which acts as a social 'base' (Berger, 1967, p. 45), which unless the religious groups unable to sustain the experience of 'belonging' in a pluralistic context may find their members less committed (McGuire, 2012, p. 38).

Traditionally, the identity of the Nagas as a tribal - naked, animist and head hunter has been constructed as the binary opposite to the identity of the Nagas as Christian, educated and therefore reformed (Kikon, 2009). However, this jubilee celebration has shown that it was an affair of integrating and harmonizing tradition while keeping the essence of Christianity. It is evident that the church leaders and the congregations have intentionally or unintentionally come to a realization point that their traditional practices are bound to be a part of their worship for an inclusive and active participation of every church member, therefore, appropriation of their traditional practices has become indispensable.

3.8 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has therefore, give a historical account of how the coming of American missionaries and how their mission work has changed the religious beliefs and socio-cultural practices of the Nagas. This led to conflict between the two religions. There

¹⁸ A shawl worn by man, black in colour with yellow and orange stripes at the border.

¹⁹ A set comprising a white skirt wrap with black and terracotta stripes at the border and a matching shawl.

²⁰ Pastor of Mezoma Baptist Church, Mezoma village. Interviewed on 24th December 2021.

were conflicts but there was also negotiation. The tension that has emerged in the midst of transition requires an ample effort of negotiation from both the converts and the non-converts, which at times requires the intervention of colonial courts, a significant feature in mitigating the contentions. The nature of negotiation during the colonial rule was mainly in the light of a clear-cut demarcation based on what a Christian should comply and what not to. The judgement given by the colonial court to settle the disputes has an impact on *Krüna*, rationalised the charisma of *genna*. The nature of negotiation as a continuous process is depicted during the celebration of *sekrenyi* within the village, *khel* and family circle, a negotiation based on interaction and mutual understanding. The celebration of *sekrenyi* became a platform for the Christians to assert their Naga identity and the incorporation and appropriation of traditional practices to express their religiosity was seen among the Christians. On the other hand, the *Krünamia*'s effort to keep their religion intact but at the same time need to accommodate the Christian practices is changing the structure of *Krüna* beliefs.

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