

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE AOS OF NAGALAND : INTROSPECTION AND REFLECTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

This writing covers the history of social and cultural transformation of the Aos during the 19th and 20th centuries. It will trace how the transformation from Ao Naga traditional life-style and religion to Christianity evolved and influenced the modernization of the tribe. It will evaluate the consequences and enumerate both its merits and demerits. It is a compact history of more than 130 years and an attempt is made to articulate major issues and analyze them.

1. Habitat: The present habitat of the Ao people lies in the extreme North East border of India between 26.12 and 26.45 degree North Latitude and 94.18 and 94.50 degree East Longitude respectively¹.

The land is elevated to an altitude of 1000-2200 meters above sea level². It enjoys a monsoon type of climate with cool winters and temperate summers, rainfall averages of 2500 millimeters during the 9 months of the rainy season, with July and August being the heaviest³. Evergreen forests are abundant.

The population of the Ao according to the 1991 census was approximately 1,57,207 and 95 percent were, Christians.

2. People: - The Ao people are generally independent and content with what they have. They are Mongoloid in stock⁴, migrated to the

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¹W. C. Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam*, 1925, p. 1. Hereinafter cited as Smith, *The Ao*. See also *The New Pictorial Atlas of the World*, p.5.

²B. B.Gliosh, *Nagaland District Gazetteers. Mokokchung District*, p.3. Hereinafter cited as Ghosh, *Gazetteer*.

³Ghosh, *Gazetteer*, p. 16.

⁴Smith, *The Ao*, pp.255-256.

present habitat sometime between A.D 400-900⁵ and settled in Mokokchung district in Nagaland State. The region consists of five mountain ranges and One Island.

2. TRADITIONAL AO SOCIETY AND RELIGION

1. Society:

a. Polity: - The Ao Traditional village polity is continuing in every village but with less effect, due to modernization. This polity is democratic in form. The elected members will supervise the village administration for thirty years. After which, it will be handed over to the incumbent younger generation of people. This polity is called the **Putumenden**. It has five cycles, which rotates after every 25-30 years of its tenure. The name of these phases of polity are:

Mejensanger Putu
Mepongsanger Putu
Kosasanger Putu
Reongsanger Putu
*Medemsanger Putu*⁶

When one round of these five cycles is accomplished, then it is called an *Asu*. Each *Putumenden* has the tier of offices for administration namely:

The Unger [President]
The Tazung [Cabinet]
The Tekong [State Ministers]
The Tarsosang [Deputy Ministers]
The SetarlSosanglak [Members]⁷

In this way, the Ao people had their scientifically organized -village polity. It functioned in the proper administration of the village. An Ao village is a republic. Beyond their village, contacts werleftiscouraged, for

⁵A. Bendangyabang. *History of Christianity and Change*, a Th.D dissertation, pp.23-30. In this work the author has done an extensive study and interview to ascertain this period. Hereinafter cited as

A Rendangvabaniy- *Th.D. Thesis*.

⁶A. Bendangyabang. Th.D. Thesis, p. 31.

⁷*Ibid.* p.32.

it was considered as foreign and an enemy. Moreover there were wars between the villages and heads were cut off in battles.

b. Morung/ Arju: - In traditional Ao society Arju or Morung was the highest learning place. There was *Arju* in every sector of the village, maintained by their own clan. Here young boys were trained, and educated for various traits of life. It enabled an Ao to face any eventualities in life. In other words, *Arju* was the University for an Ao.

c. Headhunting: - Until the advent of Christianity the practice of headhunting was prevalent among the Ao people. It was believed that by bringing heads they would bring good name, good fortune, and fertility to the land. Often youngmen would vow not to indulge in pleasurable acts until a head of an enemy was brought home. Those who brought heads were given high honor and respect in their society. They deserve special status and rights in the community. However, to bring the head of an enemy was not easy, but requires perseverance, patience and spirit of valor with good ethical living. In order to achieve this, one was required to live chaste and be ethical in every walk of life. In this way strict discipline and ethical living was maintained.

The motive for bringing heads was manifold. First it was to appease the gods which brought prosperity to the land. Secondly it had a political motive, for those villages that refused to submit and pay tribute were either challenge'd to a war or to pay huge war indemnity. If not their heads were cut off.

Heads taken in a wrong manner were discouraged and hunters were humiliated as cowards, because this would invite unwanted wars. It respected head taking only after a direct challenge in an appointed place and time. So they honored and respected llpds of equal combatants. Also, as an act of revenge, for killing without a reason the relatives took heads in return. Therefore, heads of children and women were discouraged. But some tribe among the Nagas values the heads of women very highly because their long hair would adorn the war dance costumes.

d. Marriage: - Marriage among the Ao people is inter-clan exogamous. They do not marry from within one's own clan. They maintain

strict monogamy, but joint family and dowry is not known in their society. The wedding feast is arranged from both the sides and hosted in either of the houses, usually at the bride's house. For these expenses the grooms' family pay their share which is called *senmen*. The marriage feast is maintained with less expense.

Penalty for divorce used to be very expensive, so it is seldom found among the traditional Ao. There are some cases on which one can divorce: Firstly on the ground of barrenness or not bearing male offspring, secondly due to parental interference and thirdly on the ground of adultery. The offender will have to pay a heavy penalty called *Kilamet*⁸.

c. Slavery: - Slavery was prevalent among the Ao people. The losers in war would surrender themselves as slaves to the powerful village. There will be peace with them as long as the slaves served them well. If they did not serve well, the treaty for peace was considered broken and so there will be further war. Another type of slavery was found in the form of purchased slaves. They were kept for life and called bonded slaves.

f. Women: - Position of women among the Ao society was not stable. The patriarchal family system had less room for the status of women. However Ao women had every freedom to maintain their own wealth. They were considered the weaker sex and so did not have opportunity for public administration and could not own landed property. Ao women mixed freely in every social function, taking equal share with men. They played significant role in all feasts and festivals.

2. Religion

The Ao socio-cultural, religious and political life is closely knitted so that it is difficult to isolate one from the other.

The traditional religion of the Ao was not a moral code. The ceremonies were designed to do what was right in the religious sphere. If the sacrifices due to the deities were ignored, then hard times would come to the person, family, village, and community. Thus religious duty was a

⁸In the event of *Kilamet*, one has to pay fine of more than 1-2 lakhs of rupees in our time. Earlier they used to pay in kinds of Pigs or Cow i.e., 9 or 10 large pigs.

matter of appeasing the gods. Aos believed that universe was filled with multitudes of spirits with whom they had to deal. So they cringed in fear before the unknown powers that seemed to bring harm. This fear had made them veritable slaves. Some writers therefore have criticized this as absurd and unreasonable. However absurd it might seem, the people of the time were confronted by such belief.

The traditional Aos had the problem of suffering; they saw innocent suffer, seemingly without a cause. So it was natural to assume that they were surrounded by malevolent spirits that caused all these misery and sufferings. To placate these malicious spirits, various rites and ceremonies were performed. They were traditional, without knowing why they observe certain rites in a peculiar manner, but were treated with all seriousness despite the vagueness. Propitiation of the evil and capricious spirit was particularly the sum and substance of their religion.

A religious Ao had to be true to the traditions of the tribe. Every routine of life had to be practiced, either traditionally or superstitiously, which were an integral part of their religion. Their religious beliefs and practices guided their life, so that their religion was more than mere holy days and use of sacred implements.

They performed the rites to drive away the mysterious powers about them that would bring calamity to their doors. They refrained from work on certain days, in order to have good crops. To get water in die Welt they performed certain rites; offered sacrifices at the Wage gate, lest the dreaded pestilence came stalking boldly in to ruthlessly claim both hoary and stalwart youth as victims. Thus the entire village united to offbirthie Weed sacrifices and observances.

Priesthood among the Ao people had a respectable status. There were priests as sacrificers, soothsayers, diviners and medicine-men. They were chosen from those who had good moral standing in society. They had chief priests called *Putiunger* and junior priests as *Putipangmi*, who succeeded the chief priests.

They believed in life after death. One's deeds here on earth determine their life after death. Good and honest people will go to the god of death

called *Meyutsungba* and live a peaceful life everafter. But evil and crooked people will suffer miserably in the world after death. So honesty and good ethical life was aspired by traditional Aos.

These traditional practices and beliefs shifted with Christianisation and British westernised rule. This will be discussed in the following section.

3. THE AOS CONTACT WITH CIVILIZATION

1. The Ahoms

The Ao's remote traditional life was exposed to modernity by contact with their immediate neighbor in the Assam plains. This was possible because people were in need of salt. Without salt it was difficult to survive. However, they did not have an accepted currency by which they could trade, and their trade system in those days was by the barter system. So Ao people went with their crops to get salt in exchange.

The Ahoms came and settled in the present Assam valley sometimes in AD 13th century⁹. Originally they came from Thailand under the leadership of Prince Sukhapa.

Not only for the salt trade but also for othermerntial provisions, the Aos started visiting Assam plains occasionally. Usually the whole village would go down to Assam once a year for trade. Because they were in fear of their heads, going together was more a necessity. Further, only some people knew the road and language, so the whole village had to depend on these particular person, and even neighbouring villages would make peace with them to join such a group.

One tradition says that the Ahoms found broken pieces of wood chips and earthen pots at the delta of the *Dikhu* River which gave them an indication that there could be human habitation. On tracing the upper stream they met with Ao fishermen and made friends with them and started their regular visits¹⁰. Another similar tradition tells that elephant hunters

⁹B. B Ghosh, *History of Nagaland*. pp. 61-62. Hereinafter cited as Ghosh, *History*.

¹⁰Ghoshk Gazetteers, p. 37.

from Assam made friends with them and introduced themselves to the Ahom Raja and began to visit them constantly.

The Ahoms were interested in making friends with the Aos, because the Aos and other Nagas were headhunters. Making friends with them would help to live in peaceful and secure life. Further, the hills were a good place for the Ahoms to shelter during internal feuds, external aggressions, floods and famine¹¹. Furthermore, the Ao damsels were very beautiful and the Ahom kings and princes were attracted to many them. Gradually some of them entered into matrimonial alliance.

2. With the British

The treaty of Yandabo signed between the East India Company and the king of Ava [Burma] on 24 February 1826 paved the way for the British to occupy Assam plains. This gave opportunity for them to have contact with the hill people who used to raid the plains constantly. The American Baptist Missionaries working in the Assam plains started their entry into the Ao land.

3. With the Missionaries

The missionaries living in Assam since 1836 were introduced to the Ao traders. In fact the missionaries were looking for an opportunity to have such a contact. This led to a greater opportunity for the Ao as well as missionaries to mutually develop their relationships and learn their languages, customs, and traditions, and this made way for an entry for missionaries to the land in the hills.

4. ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY TO AO LAND

The American Baptist missionaries opened a mission centre at Sibsagar Town in 1845. Here Rev. Edward Winter Clark [popularly known as Dr. Clark] held responsibility as superintendent of the mission printing press. E.W.Clark with his Assamese evangelist Godhula Brown met an Ao named Supongmrcen. They requested him to teach their language and culture. He consented and taught them some of their way of, life. This

¹¹Gait, *History of Assam*, pp.124, 156. Hereinafter cited as Gait, *History*

gradually paved the way for Godhula Brown and Clark to plan for an entry into Ao land, with the gospel. However, the Home Board in America restricted Clark from going beyond the British administered region. So only Godhula could go and venture the Ao Naga Hills. About this Clark wrote:

Several months ago I set one of the very best of my native assistants at picking up Naga. He has partially mastered one dialect; he has been on to the hills. At first he was doubtless in considerable peril for his life, as they suspected him of being a Government spy.... But at the end of the three days, they became convinced that he was not a Government spy; and then there are entire freedom of conversation and a very great desire to hear the gospel... When he left, men, women and children shed tears. They sent two of their men and a bodyguard with him to his house¹².

Another letter dated December 5, 1871 speaks of how the Ao people at first threatened Godhula:

Mr. Clark, Dec. 5th, 1871, reports that several months ago a native preacher was sent to one of the villages in Naga hills, where for the first three days, the people avoided him, fearing that he was government spy. But when they were satisfied that he was a true friend and a messenger of the glad tidings of the gospel, they manifested great desire to hear and there was an apparent rush for Christianity¹³.

Another letter of Clark confirm the character of the Ao people. The letter reads:

Character of Nagas: Now a few words about these savages of the hills. They are men of blood and war. Their fighting is all hand to hand, with big knives and spears. With them it is no glory to kill a noncombatant or a slave. But as our Indians prized scalp, so these

¹²E.W.Clark, *Letter, 1872*, pp. 125,126, As found in A Bendangyabang. *History of Christianity in Nagaland; A Source Material, 1998*, p. 49. Hereinafter cited A. Bendangyabang, *Sources*.

¹³*Ibid.*

men glory in the head of a warrior; and as among some of the tribes, a man is hardly considered a man till he has taken human life... They live only on the crests of hills, in villages of from 300 to 1,300 inhabitants. The... villages ... are guarded night and day. They wear very little clothing, and eat meat when either fresh or putrid ... Their forms of government are usually quite democratic ... They are religious or rather superstitious ... they have no caste ... no written language ... these Nagas have a good name for truthfulness and for general purity of life...¹⁴

As a result of these, there were conversions and the Church was established for the first time in Ao Naga village of Deka Hairnong [Molungkimong]. E. W Clark baptized the first nine converts at Sibsagar on 10 Nov. 1872¹⁵.

Encouraged greatly by Godhula's report Clark decided to venture into Naga Hills even without official permission. About this adventure Clark has mentioned in this letter:

I have made a hasty trip to the Naga Hills. The preacher to the Naga Hills ... came down with nine of the Nagas ... were baptized ... I we up with them. Sixty men came down to escort us ... I was exhausted, though we went up by the shortest and easiest route¹⁶.

This was historic because it was the first time ever that a white missiona had stepped onto Ao land and Baptisms were undertaken in the Ao village. Earlier baptisms were taken at Sibsagar. With this introduction, the Christian Church was established and began to grow. Initially Godhula Brown helped in administration of sacraments and worship services for those believers. During which, he made several visits to neighboring Ao villages.

In 1876 Clark decided to live outside of the British flag in an unadministered territory, at the risk of his own life. About this his wife wrote:

¹⁴*Ibid.* pp.50, 51

¹⁵*Ibid.* p.75

¹⁶*Ibid.*

To live beyond the English flag at that time required a permit from the Viceroy of India, residing in Calcutta. On making application Mr. Clark received the reply that should he enter the Naga wilds he must do it at his own risk, with no expectation whatever of protection from British arms¹⁷.

On Much 1, 1876 he and his cook went and settled at Molungkimong village. Between March and October Clark tried his best to develop the mission work. But in a non-Christian dominated village, it was difficult to exercise all his wishes. Therefore, he decided to form a new Christian village where there would be freedom to do things, and to organize in a Christian way.

5. CHRISTIAN MISSION ACTIVITIES

1. New Christian village

On 24 October 1876 Clark with some Christians and all those who wished to join him marched out of the old village to form a new Christian village named Molungyimsen. It was about 5 kilometers away from the Molungkiniong [Old] village. For a few nights they stayed under a starry canopy and at the risk of their heads in the midst of headhunters. The resolutions they made in the new village to do away with all their traditional practices were :

- No worship of traditional gods.
- No headhunting & raiding, nor help those who do.
- No feast of merit
- No *Sungkong*
- No Gennas or taboo
- No oath taking
- Those who wish to join traditional practice may leave and their property confiscated
- No slaves
- No taxation

¹⁷Mary Mead Clark. *A Corner in India*, pp. 15-16. Hereinafter cited as Clark. *Corner*.

No ownership of land¹⁸.

Many of the new resolutions were good for Christians but for an Ao at this time there were problems, as these resolutions had been influenced by western culture. Naturally the new Christian village was under constant threat from raiders. The need for having the traditional alliance of a strong village as foster father came to their mind, but no big village was willing to come to their aid, because they had forsaken them without any reason. However, this matter was solved after much diplomatic effort.

2. Progress of Christian mission works

The first Church formed at Molungkimong in 1872 had to face a problem due to the mass exodus of Christians from it to the new village in 1876. Now there was a greater concentration of mission activities at Molungyimsen. Godhula Brown mostly looked after the Church affairs. Merangkong Church was formed in 1881, having Godhula as its pastor. Later in 1892 Molungkimong Church was also reorganized, and in 1893 Warnaken Church was formed.

The first Christian marriage was solemnized in 1878 at Molungyimsen church between Huddon Evan, an Assamese, and Noksangla, an Ao lady. E. W. Clark solemnized them. The administration of these sacraments continued one after another, which was new to the traditional Ao people.

At the very outset, the understanding of Ao society by missionaries was very essential. In spite of some limitations E.W. Clark managed to respond positively to the socio-political and cultural requirements. His concern for health and hygiene, food, dress and treatment of sick won the hearts of the Aos and created a cultural awareness in them. The Aos did not know of the use of soap, lanterns, and bathrooms. Missionaries instructed them in the proper use of all of these.

The need to educate the Ao came next so in 1878 the wife of first missionary Mary Mead Clark opened a school. Further, the need for a

¹⁸A. Olemkilep, Laishir Mungchen: *Nagaland first Christian Church*, 1972. P.44. Hereinafter cited as Olem, *Laishir*.

textbook was met by writing primer and various translation works by E. W. Clark. They were taught English and the Ao language in the school.

The purpose of this school was to allow the Ao to learn how to read and write. About their first school M. M. Clark wrote:

On opening our first school, the children came pouring in as if for a holiday; but as soon as they understood that quiet and attention were the rule, all was changed¹⁹.

Gradually missionaries introduced clothing culture; boys to wear dhoti and girls sari. The students were to abstain from vices and expected to have clean bodies and clothing. This revolutionized the life style of Ao Christians. This early education led the Ao people to literacy as well as uplifting the community. After seeing the development, several villages opened themselves and invited missionaries to open schools. The schools helped to begin new churches in many villages. The schools were managed with moderate support from missionaries. Their contribution file shows:

Direct contribution of the Aos	Rs. 126.5 Annas
Indirect contributions from the Aos	313.
Government grand-in-aid	780.
Assionary contribution	730 ²⁰ .

This way, resources were tapped and the salary for teachers and expenses for student books were met.

Rev. E. W. Clark's main contribution was in the development of literature and formulation of a common language. The Ao people did not have a written literature. The formulation of language from phonetic to written script was the duty of E. W. Clark. For this, he arranged two language teachers and paid them one rupee each. In order to do justice for a common language he toured and surveyed all Ao villages. He even thought of providing Assamese script, which should have been easiest but would have been a great blunder. Finally he decided to adopt the Roman script and *Chongli* dialect for the Ao literary language.

¹⁹Clark, *Corner*, 84.

²⁰Ghosh, *Gazetteer*, p.211.

Clark brought a hand printing press in 1880, on which all the books and primers were printed. Some translations of New Testament gospels, Songbook, Ao Grammar, and other textbooks meant for schools, were printed. This geared up literary advancement at the initial stage.

The Mission enterprise of Clark was very impressive. Initially the motive of American Baptist Home Mission in launching the Assam mission was to connect the China and upper Burma mission. They did not intend to evangelize the Assam and adjoining places. Therefore, it was the aim of missionaries to keep looking for avenues to expand their mission jurisdiction. Clark's responsibility was to open mission stations among the Angami tribe in Kohima, Lotha tribe in Wokha, and he even attempted to open mission stations among the Chang and Konyak at the early period²¹.

Clark even initiated the making of footpaths between the villages, so that gospel could reach all the villages. He made a suspension bridge over the *Mikik* River in 1888. This made him popular and attracted the respect of the people as well as British Government.

Clark was instrumental in introducing British administration to the Ao land. In 1885 the English government assumed sovereignty over a portion of Ao tribe and by April 1889 whole of Ao, land was added to British territory. All the villages were officially counted for taxation²².

The British administration made Mokokchung as its administrative headquarters. Developmental work was geared up. Realizing the need to base the mission centre the government headquarters; Clark made a survey and selected Impur to be the mission station. In 1894 the mission centre was moved from Molungyimsen to Impur. Describing about this Mrs. Clark wrote:

---New lines of work were inaugurated. Our long-projected plan was considered and its early execution entered upon with the hope of eventually reaching other tribes. From the beginning it was never contemplated, stopping alone with these tribes bordering on the frontier; but on and on, conquering and to conquer beyond and still

²¹Clark, *Corner*, p.112.

²²*Ibid.*, pp.120,126.

beyond, until these mountains should be spanned and the kingdom of our Lord extended from Brahmaputra to Irawady, and from the Irawady to the Yangtze²³.

In appreciation another missionary F. P. Haggard also wrote saying:

We consider the site an ideal one, being central to the tribe, near the great government bridle path, and only a few miles from government headquarters for the Ao tribe, we shall also be between two villages with an aggregate population of five thousand and not far from others. It is beautiful site, on the crest of the mountain²⁴.

In the new centre work distribution among the missionaries was as follows: Rev. Clark was responsible for translation and literature, Rev. F. P. Haggard for Bible teaching and Rev. S. A. Perrine for managing and teaching in the training school.

Later the British official came forward by giving some grant-in-aid and provided scholarships to deserving students. The British government made one of the missionaries W. F. Dowd as part time inspector of schools. Education during this time was centred on the immediate need for writing and reading the Bible and to train some clerks and teachers. From 1900 onwards men of vision from among the people changed the course of education from mere literacy to the preparation for life and living.

Gradually besides the giving of grants, the British government itself took over many educational institutions. It then became mere head knowledge, moral and ethical values slowly faded away. Thus quality in education declined.

The institution of Ao Association at the early stage in 1896 and later known as Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang [ABAMI] ushered in significant unity drive among the Christians. - In due course, it could execute several projects for the Church and society. It adopted modernized methods in burial rites, dress, food habits, ethical life, and many socio-cultural issues. At one stage it played a major role in the prevention of other

²³*Ibid.*, p.135.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p.136.

denominations from coming into Ao land. On the other hand, it took effective measures to propagate the gospel among the Ao people, as well as neighboring tribes.

The institution of *Meri Mission* in 1926 was the keen initiative of the *ABAM*. At this stage the Ao Christians launched cross-cultural evangelism and most of the tribes in Tuensang area were evangelized. It is interesting to see the fund raising method for this mission:

1899 Ao churches collected	Rs. 17.00
Missionaries contributed	17.00
1900 Ao churches collected.	27.00
Missionaries contributed	27.00
1901 Ao churches collected.	28.00
Missionaries contributed	28.00
1902 Ao churches collected	20.00
Missionaries contributed	20.00 ²⁵

In this manner the mission fund increased and it encouraged every believer to contribute at the very early stage. Mission mindedness among the people also developed. The mission enterprise of the Ao people is significant even today.

From 1904 onward, the Christian and non-Christian population became almost equal. The Christians did not observe their old traditional religious practices. So the non-Christian brothers challenged them. This created a tussle. The administration favored the non-Christian and forced the Christians to abide by their traditional norms. But the *ABAM* played a significant role in winning over the confidence of administrators and obtained permission to exempt them from the traditional religious practices. This was followed by mild persecution of the Christians.

Along with the *ABAM*, the Ao Women's Association and Ao Christian Youth Endeavor were also formed. Together they withstood the test and worked for the advancement of the Christian mission.

²⁵Kijungluba- *Nokinketer Mungchen Early Ao Church History*, p. 77. Hereinafter cited as *Kijung Nokinketer*.

3. Progress of Christianity in the Second Phase.

After the Indian independence in 1947 the political situation in the Nagaland State went from bad to worse. It hampered many activities. Further, the situation was aggravated by the influx of the Indian Army and their atrocities. With the Indian Army, the media like Cinema, (Hindi Commercial film), Radio, Television came to the land. All these had adverse effect on the Nagas and Aos in particular. The Church leaders, who were new in their responsibilities with limited education and training could not tackle this upheaval of change.

These new responsibilities on the Ao Christian leadership were caused because of the forceful evacuation of foreign missionaries on the pretext that they helped the insurgency movement which was later proved wrong. Along with the socio-political up-rising the absence of competent leadership resulted in a generation gap. The political and social condition of the people faced a drastic change from 1955 onward. The Naga insurgency movement was uncontrollable; the new Ao Church leaders were unable to tackle the scenario of socio-cultural shift, which was drastic. Further, statehood for Nagaland was declared in 1963. It ushered in developmental projects aimed to counter the insurgency operations and to convince the people about the need of co-operation. However, these developments were unplanned and randomly carried out so it took another ugly turn which adversely affected the life style of the people.

After the Indian independence, several Christian denominations arrived and started their mission activities in Inida. Some of them, instead of winning the non-Christians to their fold, undertook sheep stealing activity. This created more enmity among the Christian brothers. The denominations found in Aoland are the Pentecostals, Revivalists, Assembly of God, and the Roman Catholics. However, majority of the Aos are Baptist. The educational system during this time was more degree oriented and competitive than quality education. Further educational pursuit was mainly aimed at getting, white collared jobs. Moral standards declined.

6. ANALYSIS

The advancement among the Ao people has surprised many political diplomats, sociologists, historians, and neighboring states. Their transformation from the head hunting culture to the present status has puzzled many. It also raised several questions on the issue of fast decaying traditional culture and life style. Political diplomats blame the Christian missionaries and sociologists for the Western influence with its Western administrative policy on the Ao people.

Rather than blaming one another, we can analyze historically and examine various contributing factors at different levels. We recognize the contribution of different agencies towards this cause.

Within a period of 130 years since they came into contact with modern civilization, the Ao people have a literacy rate of about 80 percent Christian population of about 98 percent and have more than 135 churches with average communicant members ranging between 1000-15000²⁶ in each church. All the churches are self-supported. Rather, Ao churches have initiated and opened mission centres in five neighboring tribes of the Chang, the Sangtam, the Phom, the Konyak, the Yimchunger, and the Kheartmungan during their initial stages. Beyond their own State, mission centres were opened in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Indo-Bunna, Ofissa, Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim borders.

The evangelistic thrust of the Ao Christian is unique and often praise worthy. However, at this juncture, the study wishes to examine the reason for its dramatic growth and westernization. No doubt, every changing society faces some problem or other, and there should be some motivating factors for it. A society cannot remain stagnant, it must change.

²⁶*Government of Indian 1991 Census*, with decadal growth and reports and interviews from various organizations and Associations. Interesting part to note at this point is that the census was taken from the Ao people residing within Ao region. Whereas this information includes survey of Ao people residing outside of Ao land. Uniqueness of Ao people is that wherever they go they keep planting Church. Thus there are Ao Churches in all the district headquarters and subdivisional headquarters in Nagaland and even outside Nagaland at Shillong, Lumding and part of Assam Plains.

First of all the Educational programme introduced by the missionaries opened the eyes of the people. Later the British and Indian administration offered education just for the sake of degrees, which did not produce moral and ethical values. This shift distorted the quality of life.

The second limitation was the inability of the missionaries to contextualize and prove an adoptive spirit to the traditional Ao Christian lifestyle. In the name of the Christian lifestyle, the socio-cultural practices of the people were altered or swept away. Nevertheless, they made their best attempt to learn and adapt as many practices as they could.

The moment, India got Independence, political uprising became a mounting pressure, which required special attention. However, this was left unattended for a long time. Instead of careful and prompt attention, the Indian leaders replied with a random development programmes and by the sending of Armed forces. This dehumanized the people. The Naga problem was a political one and should have been handled politically rather than with arms, the Indian Army.

Further, availability of modernized media and goods like cinema²⁷, Television, film magazines, alcohol, tobacco and all vices swept the land. Through the agency of Indian Army these were made accessible and have created a situation of unimaginable change. The people are not only westernized but are Indianized too. Unfortunately the Indianization was more on a negative line. An adoptive spirit in the form of the *Ao Mungdang*, was there. The Church leadership which introduced traditional leadership gave opportunity to Aos to retain their traditional spirit and culture. The banning, however, of several of their traditional practices by the government forces, with no alternatives provided, has greatly jeopardized their normal routine of life and it has nearly detribalized the people.

²⁷We know that Cinema has both negative and positive impact. For the Naga people at its early stage, it was more of a negative influence because, one for sure, they did not understand the language and only watched the actions. Secondly since no commentator or a competent person is there to help how to understand and select ethical and non-ethical values for themselves. So bad elements dominated and spread around fast.

Despite all the troubles and hardships and even without a strong support from other Churches in India, the Aos and tribal Churches in North East India are flourishing vibrantly and setting an example for mission minded self supportiveness to the age old Churches in India. Christianity unified all the Ao independent villages and brought them under one common language and platform of the *Ao Mungdang*. This ushered their solidarity.

CONCLUSION

Change in any society is inevitable due to fast modernization and globalization. Along with the global trend, Ao Churches, and their society too is moving towards modernization in many respect. Every change and advancement need not be termed as westernisation, though the western world is considered an advanced society.

Ao people are advancing in many respects. With proper motivation and encouragement it will effectively advance with a clear perspective. Further their traditional culture should also stand as a paradigm providing avenues to incorporate its elements in their ongoing developments. This will make a good fusion of the old and new for the younger generation to maintain their tribal solidarity. Their society is not completely detribalized, because of the adoptive spirit maintained by Christianity from the very early stages. Due to high literacy rate they are advanced and modernized. No doubt the people under study were left unattended when attention was needed. Now that the awareness has been created, with proper planning and responsible management the tribal solidarity of the Aos could be redeemed.

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