

## **A MATTER OF BELIEF**



# **A MATTER OF BELIEF**

*Christian Conversion and  
Healing in North-East India*

**Vibha Joshi**



***Berghahn Books***  
New York • Oxford

Published in 2012 by

**Berghahn Books**

www.berghahnbooks.com

©2012 Vibha Joshi

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Joshi, Vibha.

A matter of belief : Christian conversion and healing in north-east India / Vibha Joshi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-85745-595-6 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Christianity--India--Nagaland. 2. Spiritual healing--India--Nagaland. 3. Healing--Religious aspects--Christianity. 4. Christianity and other religions--India--Nagaland. 5. Nagaland (India)--Church history. I. Title

BR1156.N33J67 2012

275.4'165083--dc23

2012013683

#### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed in the United States on acid-free paper

ISBN 978-0-85745-595-6 (hardback)

ISBN 978-0-85745-673-1 (ebook)

*For Arun*



# CONTENTS

List of Maps, Tables and Diagrams	ix
List of Figures	xi
Preface	xv
Acknowledgements	xxiii
Glossary	xxvii
Abbreviations	xxix
Introduction: Christianity and the Struggle for Well-being	1
1. A Mountainous State	15
2. Classifying Spirit and Sickness	51
3. Religion of Practice	81
4. Traditional Healers	123
5. A Brief History of Christian Evangelization in the Naga Hills	159
6. Contemporary Christianity and the Healing Spirit	193
7. Church and Healing	223
Conclusion	247
Appendix 1	259
Appendix 2	267
Appendix 3	269
Bibliography	271
Index	289



## **LIST OF MAPS, TABLES AND DIAGRAMS**

### **Maps**

- |     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 1.1 | Map of India showing the location of Nagaland     | 16 |
| 1.2 | Map of north-east India                           | 16 |
| 1.3 | Administrative divisions of Nagaland              | 17 |
| 1.4 | Location of villages in Kohima and Phek districts | 18 |

### **Tables**

- |     |   |     |
|-----|---|-----|
| 3.1 | Rituals performed during Sekrenyi festival                          | 112 |
| 4.1 | List of healers   | 126 |
| 5.1 | American Baptist missionaries in Ao and Angami areas<br>(1872–1954) | 167 |

### **Diagrams**

- |     |                      |     |
|-----|----------------------|-----|
| 4.1 | Genealogy of Zeluovi | 135 |
|-----|----------------------|-----|



## LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	A view of Kohima town from the Aradura hill, 2011.	18
1.2	The mythical stone Tso Tawo at Khezakenoma village, 1991.	32
1.3	Tso Tawo was cordoned off in 1997. The present masonry wall was sponsored by the department of art and culture, Nagaland, under the 'Heritage Conservation and Protection' scheme. Khezakenoma, 2011.	33
1.4	Two elderly members of Meru clan sitting near the memorial stone, Merhema- <i>khel</i> , Khonoma village, 1991.	36
1.5	Aselie standing next to the martyrs' memorial for the members of NNC in Merhema- <i>khel</i> , Khonoma village, 1995.	37
1.6	<i>Kharu</i> (gate) at the mission compound entrance to T- <i>khel</i> of Kohima village. This gate was installed in 1947. This wooden <i>kharu</i> depicts symbols of fertility and valour, 2011.	37
1.7	A view of Kigwema village from the national highway NH39, with terrace fields in the foreground, 1997.	39
3.1	A traditional Krūna grave, known as <i>shietsa</i> , displaying the personal belongings of the deceased on a bamboo frame. Such graves are now very rare. Viswema village, 1990.	91
3.2	Grave of a young Christian man decorated with imitation flower wreaths. Decorating graves with flowers is now common to both Christian and Krūna Angami. T- <i>khel</i> , Kohima village, 2006.	91
3.3	Funeral of an elderly man being conducted by a Catholic priest in T- <i>khel</i> , Kohima village. In the photo the daughters-in-law of the man are seen sitting next to the coffin, which was later buried in the forecourt of the house, 1997.	96

- 3.4 Sekrenyi procession. Young men from Kohima village dressed in traditional clothes are on their way to the local ground in Kohima town where members from other Angami villages are also gathering to participate in the annual celebration of the Sekrenyi festival, 2011. 113
- 3.5 Young women from Kohima village in ceremonial clothes with the *khophi* baskets sitting in the spectator stand at the local ground in Kohima town during the communal celebration of Sekrenyi, 2011. 114
- 3.6 Men and women of Sievi *ki-kra-mia* of Merhema-*khel* in ceremonial clothes singing *sokre-sene* at the Sekrenyi celebration, Khonoma village, 2011. 115
- 3.7 Chakhesang dancers performing at the large Sekrenyi gathering in Tuophema, village of the present chief minister of Nagaland, at which the governor of Nagaland was the main guest, 2011. 117
- 4.1 Zao, the *themu-mia* from Jotsoma village. He was reconstructing his house; his wife can be seen in the background bent over a construction log, 2008. 128
- 4.2 Zelouvi, the *themu-mia* from Kigwema village. The photograph was taken early in the morning when he was on his way to meet patients before taking his cattle to the forest for grazing, 1995. 132
- 4.3 Ülieü Viyie, a herbalist and masseur from Thevoma-*khel* of Khonoma village, 1995. 147
- 4.4 Herbal medicines used by Ülieü Viyie of Khonoma village. She collects them from the forest during the season and stores the dried herbs in plastic bags, 1995. 148
- 4.5 Banuo, herbalist and masseuse from Kohima village, seen here attending to a friend of mine. After a prolonged illness, and having spent several days at the prayer centre in Kohima, Banuo acquired the gift to heal others. I met her at the Kohima local ground where she was attending the wrestling match as a 'physiotherapist' to one of the wrestlers, 2008. 149
- 4.6 Zazolie Rütseño of Jotsoma village practises a mix of herbal medicines and homeopathy. He was a laboratory assistant in the biology department at the Kohima Science College. In the background is the old stone fortification of *khel-1* which has remained as such since colonial times, and is mentioned in J.H. Hutton (1921), 2008. 152

- 6.1 Kohima Cathedral at Aradura hill is a fusion of Naga architectural styles. Naga cultural symbols are also painted on the monolith outside, and inside at the altar. The cathedral doors are styled on the Angami *kharu* with the image of a warrior replaced by one of Jesus. Dedicated to patroness ‘Mary help of Christians’, it was consecrated in 1991 when, for the first time, representatives of the British and Japanese Second World War veterans of the Battle of Kohima were brought together at a peace ceremony in Kohima through a symbolic laying of spears, 2008. 195
- 6.2 A Christian landscape: a view of churches in T-*khel* of Kohima village from the mission compound. In the foreground is the Rivenburg Chapel, the first church begun by the American Baptist missionaries in Kohima. It is now used as a chapel by the students of the Baptist College, Kohima. In the background is the Baptist Mission church and behind it the Christian Revival church, 2011. 205
- 6.3 Baptist church in Merhema-*khel* of Khonoma village, which celebrated its centenary in 1996. The sheer size of the church buildings sets them apart from other structures as prominent features in any Naga village, 2006. 206
- 6.4 Women returning after the morning service at the Catholic church in Kohima village. They are wearing Angami Lohe cloth. Traditional cloths are worn during formal occasions as an identity marker, but it is not uncommon to see such cloths used as daily wear combined with the universal Western dress, 1995. 209
- 6.5 Father Carolus Neisalhou Kuotsü, the first Angami ordained priest performing sacrament after the Sunday morning service in Kohima Cathedral. In the background can be seen crossed Naga spears, symbolizing peace, and the painted *dao* machete. Not visible in the photo is the stylized *mithun* head painted on the altar under the feet of crucified Jesus Christ, 2011. 211
- 6.6 Culmination of the Sunday morning service in the chanting of ‘Praise the Lord’ and ‘Hallelujah’, with people clapping their hands. Congregation at the Baptist Revival church, Kohima village, 1997. 213
- 6.7 Sunday morning service at the Christian Revival church, Kohima village. The congregation is listening to the sermon by a guest pastor, 2006. 213

- 6.8 The communal Christmas feast of the Baptist church of Merhema-*khel* in Khonoma village taking place after the Christmas morning service. Young church volunteers are seen serving the food, including *mithun* bison (*Bos frontalis*) meat that is consumed on special occasions and is considered a symbol of prosperity in Nagaland, 1990. 220
- 7.1 A banner at the entrance gate to the local ground in Kohima town inviting everyone to the divine healing services offered by the Pentecostal Church, 2006. 225
- 7.2 Final evening of the three-day Nagaland Prayer Festival held in Dimapur. It was sponsored by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council and presided over by the South Indian evangelist Paul Dhinakaran. The event was attended by more than ten thousand people, both Naga and non-Naga, and was broadcast live on a Christian TV channel, 2011. 228
- 7.3 A banner in Tenyidie at the welcome gate of Kohima village, inviting everyone to attend the praise and worship service in Tenyidie in aid of mission work at the Nagaland state academy hall in Kohima town, 2006. 229
- 7.4 A gathering of all the clans from Merhema-*khel* of Khonoma village and the representatives of civil societies to commemorate fifty years of T. Sakhrie's death. The unveiling of a memorial monolith was followed by a communal feast, 2006. 243

All photographs are by the author, Vibha Joshi.

## PREFACE

On my first visit in 1985, I had two images of Nagaland, the first being from what I had read and heard about their political movement. My father had been stationed there as a police officer at the height of the insurgency movement in 1961, before I was born. This was the image of Nagaland as a place of armed struggle for secession from India, in a seemingly remote corner of India, inhabited by a people who were closer to South-East Asians than to Indians and had recently practised headhunting. The second image of ‘Westernized’, Christian Naga was based on my observations of fellow Naga students in my college at Delhi University. Thus the first field visit to Nagaland was an eye-opener, and both denied and yet took fragments from the two images. It was an introduction to the interlacing ways in which Christianity, so-called traditional religion, indigenous lifestyles and allegedly Western influences coexisted.

After a short period in 1985 as part of an MSc field team in Nagaland, I spent three months in 1990 carrying out the first of my periods of prolonged fieldwork. This produced good friends over the years who assisted me as interpreters, especially for in-depth interviews, and who gradually introduced me to the lingua franca, Nagamese (a blend of Assamese and Hindi, see Boruah 1993), and also to the Tibeto-Burman dialect of the Naga group on whom I concentrated, the Angami; however, my command of the latter was never complete. These people were themselves a very helpful source of information, as they provided an insight into what Christianity meant to the educated village-based Angami, who were teaching in schools or working in state government departments at different levels. As the purpose of my research became clearer to them, they not only suggested names, but also sought out individuals in their villages who were regarded as being well versed in tradition and could comment on events which I was able to observe and become involved in. This also brought out an interesting aspect of the interaction between the Christian and non-Christian members of the village from different wards or *khel*. Through my friends I was also able to interview their parents. Living in the village with them meant that I could attend the Sunday church and other church-related events that were happening in their respective *khel*. With my younger friends I was able to attend the meetings and gatherings of their age-set and of the Christian youth club.

The introductory fieldwork of 1985 had familiarized me with some of the basic terms and concepts that were needed before the more detailed study. I read Hutton's (1921a) monograph on the Angami with caution, but found that many of its findings tallied with what I was told in the field, and this helped to give me, for instance, a basic idea of the ritual calendar and religious beliefs, further conveying to my Angami contacts the kind of information I was seeking. Getting to know, in this way, some of the key terms was taken as an indication of my eagerness to learn about Angami. At the beginning of fieldwork, I might sometimes be told that the information I sought was already there in Hutton's book and that I should consult it. I got around this objection by saying that Hutton did not record everything and that there were variations between villages and, above all, my interest was in their contemporary practice. On the other hand, some people I met categorically told me that it was not easy to write about the religious beliefs and practices of Angami, as there are variations in every village. They cautioned me that Hutton had emphasized the Khonoma tradition, calling them Angami par excellence, and that I should be careful not to perpetuate a similar bias in my research. I always agreed with them on this, adding that more indigenous research should be done to document the cultural variation.

Some anthropologists view the 'friend cum informant' category of people in one's field area with scepticism (see Davies 1999: 80–84), and it is true that the potentially conflicting aspects of the relationship have to be kept in mind. But my experience was that friendships were anyway inevitable and in the village were a means of entry into other Naga relationships, in which it became possible to discuss often sensitive matters frankly and honestly. In the present political situation in Nagaland, the importance of this kind of initial and prolonged acceptance is considerable. Partly in response to suggestions made by friends, I also combined my fieldwork with working on other projects.<sup>1</sup> One was to write a pictorial ('coffee table') book on Nagaland; others included a survey of handicrafts, a comparative study of contemporary textile weaving among the Angami and Lotha Naga with older cloths from the Pitt Rivers Museum collection, and acting as guest curator and co-editor of a book for the exhibition of Naga objects at the Museum der Kulturen, Basel. Through these projects I met people from other Naga ethnic groups and a wide variety of specialists in different fields.

Although the anthropologist is the 'other' in her field situation,<sup>2</sup> in my case the otherness was compounded by my being 'Indian' as opposed to 'Naga', and Hindu as opposed to Christian. My being Indian was relevant during the insurgency in Nagaland – as an Indian staying in the Naga villages I could easily have been accused by the insurgents of spying.<sup>3</sup>

How do the Angami perceive me? For the Angami I am a *tephrie-mia*, that is to say 'an outsider from the plains'. The cultural difference is accentuated by physical difference because the Naga resemble the South-East Asian peoples. The contrast between the hills and the plains has been the fulcrum of the relationship between the Naga and the non-Naga. The fascination with the

binary opposition between the hills and the plains, and the culture of the people who occupy these two geographically distinct regions, is reflected in some Naga folklore. Some of the Naga legends and myths reveal a complementary relationship between the two, usually emphasizing that the Naga and the plainsmen were brothers who separated from each other in the mythical past and went their separate ways (Hutton 1921a: 260–61).

The difference between the hills and plains people has continued to be recognized as such. The people from the plains have thus been categorized as *tephrie-mia*.<sup>4</sup> The term may also be applied to the offspring of those Naga women who have married non-Naga. There have been cases in which even after a husband has gone through the adoption process into an Angami family, he continued to be called an outsider. On the other hand, there is an ambiguity about the concept of *tephrie-mia*. There are several cases of adoption of non-Naga and their induction into a clan. During my fieldwork I have come across some ‘Angami’ men and women who were born out of such mixed marriages.

Another term used for people from mainland India is *India-mia*, literally, ‘people from India’. In casual conversations people often make a distinction between Naga and Indians. The term *India-mia* is often used for army personnel, non-Naga businessmen, and also when speaking of a non-Naga spouse from mainland India. However, apart from the obvious political connotations of this distinction, I observed that sometimes the term was used for want of a better way to distinguish a person from mainland India from a Naga. Interestingly, I was never called an *India-mia*. Also, whenever I replied to the question ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘Who are you?’ with ‘I am a *tephrie-mia*’, it was taken as a joke and I was told, ‘Oh, you know who is a *tephrie-mia*’.

My religious identity, especially in relation to my diet, was confusing to some of my acquaintances. On one occasion the niece of my host in Khonoma village made an interesting comment. Seeing me eat pork, she remarked, ‘You are not a Miya’,<sup>5</sup> a term commonly used for Muslims in Nagaland; and having a preconception of Hindus being vegetarian and non-beef eaters, she was confused about my religion when she saw me share their dry beef snack. I had to explain to her that I was a non-vegetarian Hindu, despite not normally eating beef, and that it was only in Nagaland that I had the dry snack and that I was generally happy to share food. The exception was when I was sometimes challenged by men who, in an inebriated state, might ask me to share a drink with them. Refusing their invitation would run the risk of confirming their view that Hindus do not share food with non-Hindus (as they eat meat and drink alcohol!). On the other hand, agreeing to join them in prolonged drinking would have meant going against the etiquette expected of a woman. Although rice beer forms the staple diet of both non-Christian men and women, there is a certain decorum expected of a woman and so I generally deemed it more appropriate to share only a few sips or simply laugh off an offer in good humour.

In the town and in Kohima village, I observed very few restrictions in my diet, but I tended to be selective about eating food in the village. In general, my

being Hindu was taken as an explanation for my preferred vegetarian diet. In most households I ate whatever was offered to me, but I was also able politely to say no to some food (some kinds of insects), and it was, as far as I know, taken as my personal preference.<sup>6</sup> But I did enjoy eating a variety of meat – venison, mountain goat and *mithun* – and I also tasted monkey, bear and dog meat. In the insect category, I developed a taste for the Naga delicacies – honeybee grubs and a kind of larvae cooked in the juice of bamboo shoot. As I liked eating the everyday Naga food of boiled rice, boiled vegetables, a meat dish and a chutney made of some herbs and dried fish, my hosts often said that it was easy to feed me as I was ‘not fussy about what I ate’. However, meat is a luxury that is not regularly available to everyone in Nagaland.

I also carried rations, which I contributed in the form of gifts to the families I stayed with in the villages. Biscuits, cakes and sweets were often my gifts to the children of people I interviewed. I did not pay cash to friends or interpreters in exchange for their help, as it would have changed my relationship with them; also, I had a very limited budget, most of which was spent on transport.<sup>7</sup>

The choice of where to locate the study was helped by my initial experiences in 1985, which in the 1990s helped me to identify several villages of interest, including Chumukedima, Kidima, Jotsoma, Khonoma, Mima, Kigwema, Viswema, Zhadima, Rüsoma, Kohima, Chajouba and Khezakenoma (see map 1.4); the last two are the Chakhesang villages where the legendary Chitebo tree and the magical stone are situated. The choice of these villages was therefore not random, but was determined by my wish to meet traditional healers who, I had been told, lived in them (except for last two villages). Secondly, I also knew people who hailed from these villages or had family connections in them, and could therefore guide me.

I regarded as most fortunate my choice of research topic, on traditional healing practices, for everyone had something to say on the subject and knew a healer either in their own village or another village. The name of the late Zelouvi, a famous healer from Kigwema, was known even to my non-Angami acquaintances. The advantage of my several field visits spread out over time was that not only was I able to meet most of the healers, but I was also able to interview the same person more than once. Similarly, the late Dolhouvi from Khonoma, who had refused to meet me during a couple of my earlier field stays in Khonoma village, finally agreed to do so after recognizing the seriousness of my intentions in wishing to know about his practice. Repeated fieldwork trips to Nagaland had a more general advantage: I became a familiar figure – a person who came back to record festivals and stayed in the villages. Kohima town was my basecamp from where I used to go to the surrounding villages, and Kohima village, perched on the hill, was at walking distance from where I lived. In the town I lived with my Lotha Naga friends, who also had Angami Naga relatives; it was through these friends that I came to know several key people who generously offered me accommodation and hospitality during my village stays, without expectation of monetary gain in return.

Reaching Nagaland from Delhi and Bombay (now Mumbai) takes between one and three days depending on the mode of transport.<sup>8</sup> From Dimapur, one can take either a bus or a taxi to Kohima, which I might sometimes share with friends.

During my fieldwork, political negotiations between Naga nationalist groups and the Indian Government took place, and indeed continue at the time of writing. Each time I returned to Nagaland, I witnessed changes allegedly related to the worsening security situation: tales of nationalists' financial extortion of businessmen and officers – both non-Naga and Naga – were frequently heard and reported in local newspapers; my field trips were punctuated by warnings and news of ambushes; and my vehicle and luggage were security checked by army personnel. The latter led to tense situations, as my Naga friends detested these checks, which they found humiliating, and I had to defuse the tension through friendly banter in Hindi with the security personnel. In the course of my fieldwork I found the relationship of the Naga with the army personnel to be ambiguous. The villages close to the army camps were able to buy goods at a cheap rate from the tax-free army canteen. Nagaland being a dry state, Indian made foreign liquor (or IMFL) was sometimes available to people with army contacts.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, even casual contact with the army could raise suspicions. I purposely kept a distance from the army in order to safeguard my reputation as a 'neutral' researcher.

However, I kept running into army and paramilitary personnel during my visits to the villages. Early during fieldwork in 1995, there was heavy movement of one of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Nagalim (NSCN)<sup>10</sup> factions in and around the villages where I was working. On one such occasion when I had to go to Jotsoma village to interview some healers, there were strong indications that members of one of the nationalist groups were taking refuge in the village. Although I had been warned of the situation, I wanted to interview Zao, a traditional healer. He had been away at his fields for the harvest, which had made it difficult to meet him on my earlier visits. On this particular day he was supposed to be in the village. On my way down to Zao's house, I was startled to find around ten Assam Rifles soldiers sitting with machine guns in the middle of the village at one of the sitting out places. In 1995 and during later fieldwork in 1997, it became quite common to see security personnel patrolling near villages, and high-ranking officials and politicians moving with armed escorts. In January 2001, and during my later visits from 2005 to 2011, I noticed heavy deployments of armed forces and regular checking of vehicles on the Dimapur-Kohima highway and in Kohima town after sunset. It was interesting (though disconcerting) to observe that my presence in a vehicle resulted in a less vigorous check, as the army saw me as a non-Naga and therefore less likely to be working with the insurgents.<sup>11</sup> However, this is not now always the case. In February 2011, on my way back to Dimapur town from the Oriental Theological Seminary which is situated on the outskirts of the town, we were stopped by an Assam Rifles patrol apparently because two

miniature Naga national flags were displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle in which I was travelling. The vehicle belonged to the chairperson of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation and was used for travel to camp Hebron, the peace camp of NSCN (IM) which is located close to the seminary. After a lecture on anti-India activity and the secessionist implications of the flag, we were allowed to proceed. The mood became tense thereafter for it was not clear whether the lecture was for the benefit of the 'Indian' (myself) or was directed as a reproach to my companion, a senior Naga teacher, for apparently showing sympathy for the nationalists.

During 1997 fieldwork, a ceasefire had been negotiated between the army and the NSCN (IM) rebel group.<sup>12</sup> This was, ironically, also the time when the inter-faction fights had nearly turned one part of Dimapur town into a battle zone. Almost daily encounters between the two factions meant that people had to vacate their houses in that area. Friends cautioned me about my movements, and I would try to return before dark from my visits to nearby Chumukedima village and church gatherings in and around Dimapur. Extortion and snatching of vehicles by insurgents were frequent occurrences during that period. Rather than travelling alone, therefore, I would use public transport or get lifts in the vehicles of Naga friends. Experiences of some of my friends, who had been accosted by the insurgents, and the general feeling of lawlessness in Dimapur and Kohima towns because of open interfactional fighting, meant keeping alert to what was going on around me and avoiding getting caught in any crossfire. Travelling alone in a vehicle outside the townships generally came to be considered unsafe.

Within Kohima it was convenient either to walk the distance or take buses to a suitable point from where I could go uphill and then take the flight of steps that led to *T-khel* of Kohima village, where my friends lived. While many short- and long-distance taxis are available nowadays within the townships, travelling to nearby villages still requires planning and hiring a reliable taxi, as Naga nationalist ambushes often resulted in my vehicle being stopped and checked during the early years of fieldwork. Although two main Naga insurgent groups, NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K), have entered into ceasefire agreements with the Indian security forces, this has not reduced the presence of armed Indian security forces and Nagaland state police in the region, and the interfactional fighting, extortions and murders have continued.<sup>13</sup> After nightfall, the Naga towns, especially Dimapur and Kohima, normally come to a standstill and vehicles are still regularly stopped and occupants questioned after dark.

My identity and status invited various definitions in this environment. Whenever I ran into any army patrol near the villages, the personnel often asked me whether I was a journalist. To my Naga friends I was carrying out research on different aspects of Naga culture, and to new people I was similarly introduced as a research student from Delhi and Oxford (and so not a 'spy'), and on my later visits, as Dr Joshi, an anthropologist from Oxford. A few women in the village showed their surprise and disbelief that someone should come to talk with them from 'such a faraway place'. My reply now must surely

be that it is not they but we who live away from the action, or so it sometimes seems as one considers the modern place of Naga in a world where rapid communications and transport merge their local lives with those of other localities outside Nagaland, outside India and beyond.

This underlines how much the situation now, well into the twenty-first century, differs from that of my initial fieldwork in 1985 and the 1990s during which communication by telephone was the height of luxury in Kohima and Dimapur. Later, especially from about 2005, mobile phones became popular in Nagaland. Since 2007, the possibilities of Internet connections, especially email and social networking sites such as Facebook, have made communication even faster and, with that, arranging interview meetings relatively easier. Without these latest tools it would have been quite difficult to meet some of the key people I interviewed in 2011. It is true that access to the Internet requires a regular source of electricity, which is in short supply in Nagaland, with most businesses relying on petrol- or diesel-run power generators. Getting in contact with state government employees who have good office Internet facilities is easier than with those depending on less reliable private connections. Nonetheless, the Internet has made possible transnational networks and links with the global Naga diaspora, including Naga artists, and writers based in Europe and Christian and political activities there and in other parts of the world. There is now an Overseas Naga Association in the U.K. which brings together Naga students and expatriates at an annual gathering.<sup>14</sup>

The modern rapidity, breadth and access to communication at first sight make this a world far removed from the picture handed down to us from the early colonial and missionary accounts. Yet, from the nineteenth to twenty-first century the form and content of Naga beliefs, practices and groups are kept variously recognizable, despite being sometimes part of and sometimes opposed to the growth of Christianity and nationalism. Whether as (re-)invented traditional events celebrated as such, or as contestable traces of past claims and activities, there is no evidence that the Internet revolution will dilute this variable continuity in the foreseeable future. The paradox of an internally divided people seeking broadly common sociocultural and political self-determination seems certain to sustain this continuity, for it is its very contestability which provides a focus of ongoing engagement.

## Notes

1. See Joshi 1989, 1990, 1992, 2001, 2003, 2006 and 2007 for dissertations, reports and publications resulting from these research projects.
2. In most field situations this holds true, although in recent years anthropologists have worked closer to home, in their own communities. In such situations, the 'otherness' factor is not accentuated (see articles by Pink, Caputo and Norman in Amit [ed.] 2000).
3. In 1991, in Jotsoma village, I was told by a man that if I turned out to be a spy I would meet the same fate as the three undercover intelligence agents who had been killed in Kohima six months before. Some Angami and Kuki individuals I met in the course of my research were in fact killed by Naga nationalists.

4. A distinction is made between plains people of Indian origin and the white-skinned foreigners, who are called *kekra-mia*, literally, 'white-people'. The people of Manipur Valley are called *mekrū-mia*. The Angami had an uncomfortable relationship with the Manipuri kings, who had helped the British to contain the Angami uprising of 1879.
5. It is a respectful address for Muslim men in Urdu.
6. See Douglas (1972) for an early discussion of the cultural role of food, and Sutton (1997) on how diet defines the identity of a person in fieldwork situations.
7. As has been observed, when one pays a person for a service, it can be likened to a contract with expectations that the person would be available to help at all times (see Srivastava 1992; Das and Parry 1983). However, I was able to pay for some research assistance for a couple of projects.
8. In 1990–91 there were direct flights, three days a week, to Dimapur from Delhi, but since then these have been discontinued, and nowadays one has to take a connecting flight, sometimes delayed or cancelled, from either Guwahati in Assam or Calcutta (now Kolkata) in West Bengal to Dimapur. There are also trains from Delhi to Dimapur via Guwahati, and buses between Guwahati and Dimapur.
9. The alleged generous distribution of Indian made foreign liquor (IMFL), especially rum, by the Indian security forces among the Naga to suppress the nationalist movement, has often been alluded to as 'the political rum' by the Baptist Church (see Nibedan 1978: 254).
10. There are two factions of the Naga Socialist Council of Nagaland (or Nagalim): NSCN (IM) is led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, and NSCN (K) is led by Sagwan Sankai Khaplang.
11. During my visit in January 2001, my Naga friend's vehicle was checked four times by the army in a span of ten days.
12. NSCN (K) agreed to a ceasefire in 2001. Since then, the ceasefire between the Indian security forces and the two NSCN factions has been continually extended. There is a Cease Fire Supervisory Group (CFSG) led by a chairman from the Government of India, personnel from the Assam Rifles and Indian Army that are stationed in Nagaland, Nagaland state home commissioner, Nagaland state police chief and the representatives of the two NSCN factions. Ceasefire talks are, then, held separately with each faction.
13. As a result of these activities, Nagaland state, in terms of governance, is viewed as a 'disturbed area', and under this categorization the Government of India has implemented the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Nagaland. Retrieved 10 September 2011 from [http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/armed\\_forces\\_special\\_powers\\_act1958.pdf](http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/armed_forces_special_powers_act1958.pdf)
14. Many Naga students are now registered in universities outside India, especially in Europe and the United States. Some have been sponsored by the Nagaland state government to undertake vocational courses, while others are funded privately or go on scholarships. A few Naga have settled in the United States and Europe due to work or marriage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many who have helped me in various ways in the more than twenty-five years of my association with Nagaland and during the writing of this book. When I first went to Nagaland as a student in 1985, I had not imagined that Nagaland would become the long-term focus of my work. This has only been possible due to the continuing generosity and warmth of my Naga friends and acquaintances, all of whom have given me their time, and shared their knowledge, home and hearth with me.

It would have been very difficult to conduct initial fieldwork in Nagaland without the help and hospitality of the late Emi Merry. Through Emi, I was able to make some of my closest friends, who have become my family in Nagaland. I am deeply indebted to Chipeni and Mhabeni Merry for providing me with a home in Nagaland, and for their (and their family's) continued friendship and warmth. Without their support I would not have been able to do fieldwork in Nagaland.

In Delhi, I am grateful to the officers and staff at Nagaland House for their assistance in issuing inner line permits. I am indebted to Dominic Yazokie, M. Terhüja, Atuo Shuya, Visier Sanyü and Tsilie Sakhrie for discussing and explaining various Angami concepts which helped me in the analyses of the data I collected over the years.

I am grateful for the hospitality and warmth of my Angami friends, who acted as willing informants and as interpreters supplementing my Nagamese and passive Angami. They include Abu Catherine Sekhose, Atie-ü Sekhose (Aty), Puchosale (Sano), Tsilie Sakhrie and Medozhase, and were among my hosts in Kohima, Kidima, Khonoma and Kigwema villages. I thank Seino Sakhrie for hosting me in Khonoma. She taught me how to weave on a child's loom during one of my visits, and also arranged for me to acquire Angami cloths that are now part of the Naga collection at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Atuo, Davo Chase, Tselie, Vevi, Aselie and N. Rhetso helped as interpreters in Chumukedima, Khonoma and Viswema villages. I am indebted to all the Angami healers and elders in villages who agreed to be interviewed and answered my questions patiently. Abu and Atie-ü have always made time for me, their sisters Mary and Floret also assisting occasionally. Atie-ü also translated some texts from Tenyidie into English. Through their extended

kinship network I have come to meet several key informants during my research, for which I am most grateful.

I thank the many officers in the Nagaland state government who have helped me over the years, including Banuo and Alemtemshi Jamir, the late Achum Ngullie, Kusum Siddhu and Toshi Aier. In Kohima, I am grateful to Mhonbemo Patton and Anungla Aier for their friendship.

My father's colleagues, S.C. Tripathi, a former Director General of Police on deputation to Nagaland, and O.N. Srivastava, a former Governor of Nagaland, helped during the mid-1990s when the interfactional fighting was escalating, just before the ceasefire agreement between the Indian security forces and the NSCN (IM). Thanks are also due to S.N. Chamaria and his family for hosting me in Calcutta and Dimapur during the period 1990–92.

In my most recent fieldwork, especially on the role of the Church in peace negotiations, I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Arkotong Longkumer, Along Longkumer, Aküm Longchari, Alongla Aier, Kethoser Kevichusa and Toshinano Longchar, and of Reverend Wati Aier, Reverend Wati Longchar, Niketu Iralu, Reverend Keviyiekielie Linyü, Reverend V.K. Nuh, Father Abraham Lotha and Father Carolus Neisalhou Kuostu, who allowed me the time to interview. Pfukrulhou Koza kindly accompanied me to his native village of Khezakenoma. In Oxford, I am grateful to Reverend I. Ben Wati for discussing his autobiographical book, and for sharing his memories of education in a mission school.

Thanks are due to Professor Alan Macfarlane for giving me full access to the Cambridge Naga Videodisc in the 1990s, and for making it accessible to all via the internet. My thanks are also due to Beverly Carlson at the American Baptist Church Mission Center, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, for her help with the archives of the American Baptist Mission in 1995.

Many different kinds of grants and fellowships have made this book possible. I am indebted to the Association of Commonwealth Universities' doctoral fellowship, the Emslie Horniman Fund (RAI), the Freer Exhibition, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the Nagaland Governor's research fund, the Radhkrishnan Bequest, St Edmund Hall College, Oxford University, British Academy, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen in Germany, for the post-doctoral fellowship during which this book was given final form.

Many discussions have shaped the book, in addition to those previously mentioned with Angami friends and informants. I especially acknowledge those with Nick Allen, Marcus Banks, Peter Revière, Wendy James, Alan Macfarlane, Charles Ramble, Peter van der Veer and other colleagues at Oxford University and the Max Planck Institute. I am indebted to David Parkin for insightful comments and discussions on drafts of this book, and to the publisher's two anonymous readers. Thanks are due to the library and computer staff at Oxford University and the Max Planck Institute: Mike Morris (Oxford),

Judith Probstmeyer and Simone Dietrich. I am grateful to Birgitt Sippel for formatting the illustrations and tables, and to Norbert Winnige for preparing the maps and the manuscript.

Throughout my twenty-five-year period of intermittent research, my family has supported me. I would like especially to thank my parents, Harivallabh and Nirmala Joshi, my sister Abha, my brothers Arvind and Rajiv, and my sister-in-law Tino, whose friend Emi provided the initial foothold in Nagaland. I am forever grateful to Arun and David for their patience, love and support, and for enduring my long absences during fieldwork.



## GLOSSARY

<i>dao</i>	the traditional all-purpose Naga chopping/cutting implement
<i>genna</i>	Nagamese term used by the Naga for ‘ritual’ and ‘cloistering’
<i>jhum</i>	slash-and-burn farming
<i>kehoul-mia</i>	Christians
<i>kemelo</i>	mad or mentally unstable; refers also to a person becoming deaf and dumb as a result of breaking a taboo
<i>kemesa</i>	clean
<i>kemevo</i>	priest (in Western Angami dialect)
<i>kenyü</i>	taboo as well as a prohibition on work observed by an individual, family or clan
<i>kerhu</i>	dirty
<i>ke-sia</i>	dead
<i>ketzi/</i>	
<i>keji-rhuo-mia</i>	earth spirits
<i>kharu</i>	carved wooden gate decorated with symbols of valour and prosperity, traditionally installed at the entry and exit point of a village and its wards
<i>khel</i>	a Nagamese term (originally a Pashtun word for clan/kin group), used by the Naga for the wards or clan-based spatial divisions of the village
<i>ki</i>	house
<i>kichüki</i>	youth club
<i>ki-kra-mia</i>	age-set house (in Western Angami dialect)
<i>kizie</i>	ritual offering of rice beer, in plantain or other leaves, made to the spirits during calendrical rituals
<i>kra-mia</i>	age-set (in Western Angami dialect)
<i>krüna</i>	non-Christian Angami; literally, followers of the ancestral traditions
<i>lohe</i>	traditional black-coloured shawl with alternating green and red (or pink) stripes along the border
<i>lohra-mhoshü</i>	traditional white-coloured shawl with 8–12 black and red float motifs, and alternating red and black stripes along the border

<i>mekwū</i>	war cry
<i>mia</i>	people
<i>mithun</i>	semi-wild bison ( <i>Bos frontalis</i> )
<i>nanyū</i>	ritual, as well as religion
<i>narū/natsei</i>	improper performance of ritual
<i>pelie</i>	age-set house (in Northern Angami dialect)
<i>pelie-kro</i>	an age-set (in Northern Angami dialect)
<i>penyū</i>	ritualistic prohibition on movement; also ‘cloistering’
<i>phichū-u</i>	oldest man in the village; priest in Southern Angami dialect
<i>putsano</i>	lineage
<i>rodo</i>	bad or evil spirits
<i>ruopfū</i>	soul
<i>ruotho-mia</i>	a person (or persons) appointed by the first-sower and the first-reaper as assistants who, on their behalf, collect paddy from each household after the harvest
Sekrenyi	New Year festival of the Angami, celebrated after the rice harvest
<i>sokre-sene</i>	songs sung at the time of Sekrenyi festival
<i>tei-rhuo-mia</i>	sky spirits
<i>teigi-rhuo-mia/</i> <i>tei-giliede-mia</i>	angels
<i>tekhu-mevi</i>	spirit-tiger
<i>terhuo-kesuo</i>	bad spirits
<i>terhuo-mia</i>	spirits
<i>terhuo-pe</i>	necromancer
<i>thehu-ba</i>	sitting-out or meeting place, made of stone slabs; each ward of the village has at least one such place
<i>themu-mia</i>	divinational healer
<i>thenyi</i>	festival
<i>thino</i>	clan
Ukepenuopfū	Angami supreme goddess – the creatrix
<i>usieshū</i>	offerings made to the spirits at a time of illness or misfortune
<i>zevi</i>	welfare
<i>zha</i>	big
<i>zhevo/zievo</i>	priest (in Northern Angami and Chakro dialects); used for both Christian and non-Christian priests
<i>zu/zutho/rohi</i>	locally brewed rice beer

\* the letter *ū* is used in Naga languages in place of the phonetic symbol *ə*

## ABBREVIATIONS

ABCC	Angami Baptist Church Council
CBCNEI	Council of Baptist Churches of North-East India
CNBC	Council of Naga Baptist Churches
FGN	Federal Government of Nagaland
FNR	Forum for Naga Reconciliation
GPRN	Government of Peoples' Republic of Nagaland (or Nagalim)
INC	Indian National Congress
Naga Ho Ho	Apex body of Naga comprising representatives from each Naga group
NBCC	Nagaland Baptist Church Council
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
NHDTC	Naga Hills District Tribal Council
NMA	Naga Mothers' Association
NNC	Naga National Council
NPC	Nagaland People's Council
NPMHR	Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights
NSCN (IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (or Nagalim) (Isak Chishi Swu & Thuingaleng Muivah)
NSCN (K)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (or Nagalim) (Sagwan Sankai Khaplang)
NSF	Naga Students' Federation
PHC	Primary Healthcare Centre
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization



# INTRODUCTION

## *Christianity and the Struggle for Well-being*

### **Religions in Strife**

Whatever its origins, religious essentialism, or fundamentalism as it is normally known, claims absolute knowledge. Its clerics base their authority on it. Dogmatic assertions harden membership barriers between religious communities, limiting voluntary movement in and out of them. Yet, for many people, conversion to a particular religion may seem the only route to a better life. There is a tension between long-term loyalty and the chance to join another religion. This tension has recurred at different times and places throughout the world. It became especially salient at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the era of so-called globalization, because ideas were being more rapidly communicated than ever before. On the whole, religious balkanization prevailed. But people compared religions, and some either converted to them or set up their own.

What do people want from religion? Being able to affirm belief in extra-human superior power brings personal and collective reassurance, which normally also brings promises of spiritual and bodily well-being and cure. Healing the body as well as the soul thus becomes part of the affirmation of belief. But healing the strife between religions is rarely part of the curative liturgy.

The rise of what has come to be called Hindutva in India during turn of the century modern globalization can be set alongside the alleged growing influence of radical Islam within a country that has had a long history of religious tension but also of conversion among Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and Christian communities in the lands making up what is now India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A modern focus is the disputed Jammu and Kashmir state, which has a majority Muslim population but was made part of India after independence in 1947. A more recent focus within India itself has been the issue of the Hindu Ram temple at Ayodhya, which was allegedly destroyed during an earlier Muslim invasion and which certain radical Hindus wished to

rebuild, having themselves destroyed the mosque which had been constructed on the temple's foundations.

This book does not address these complex relations of Hindu, Muslim and other populations making up an Indian politics of religion, by which, according to India's policy of 'secularism', all citizens are free to practise their own religion. These interrelationships are mentioned in order to point up a complex mosaic in which Christians figure. The role of Christianity in India may seem minor by comparison with that of other faiths, yet is evidently of sufficient concern to agitate certain Hindu activists in the country. For instance, anti-Christian pamphlets were produced by right-wing Hindu groups at the approach of Christmas 2003, and Christians celebrating Christmas were attacked by one such group, the Bajrang Dal (see *The Times of India* 24 December 2003; *Hindustan Times* 25 December 2003). The right-wing Hindu political party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), also claimed that on the eve of the same Christmas, about five hundred 'tribals' in Maharashtra state, including a local pastor, converted to Hinduism from Christianity at a VHP sponsored *sammelan* (gathering). The claim was disputed by both government and Christian authorities but may reflect the VHP self-professed programme to counter the influence of Christian missionaries in many tribal areas (*The Times of India* 27 December 2003), where people are sometimes reluctant to enter the Hindu hierarchy at a low level. In 2007 and 2008, in Orissa, the agitation, protests against conversions and persecution of the Christians by the Hindu fundamentalists brought to light the plight of those who choose to convert to Christianity over Hinduism.

The Naga peoples of Nagaland in north-east India, who are the subject of this book, have converted in great numbers to Christianity from their indigenous animistic religion, over two or three generations. Unlike the converts in Orissa and in some other areas of mainland India, however, they are sole occupants of their land and have not suffered persecution by territorial neighbours, although there have been tensions between converts and animists. The Naga clearly, then, play a role in the ongoing creation of Indian and South Asian religious diversity, having adopted Christianity in preference to Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, and so expressing their distinctiveness as a political, ethnic and linguistic grouping who stand apart from the various South Asian mainstreams.

The Naga are thus part of the wider chronicle of religious strife, while experiencing the more immediate problems of challenging and being challenged by people who support animism and those who advance the cause of Christianity. In this struggle, questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of healers from the two traditions are also religious questions: are the two sets of beliefs and practices compatible, mutually reinforcing or anathema to each other? Or are they all these things at different times? The starting point of such comparison is not in fact whether or not healers of one system are more successful than the other in effecting bodily cure, although this becomes an

important index in due course. It is rather the passion of membership and belonging, with evangelical Christians, on the one hand, proclaiming their faith of complete personal absorption and, on the other hand, animists insisting that their traditional methods are relevant for today's ills and identities, and are not always at odds with newer ones.

### **The Passion and the Pragmatic**

'Nagaland for Christ' and 'Jesus Saves' are familiar slogans in Nagaland, displayed prominently on public transport and on advertising banners on special occasions such as Christianity centenary celebrations in towns and villages. Such overt expressions of homogeneous Christian-ness, however, belie the underlying tensions and the ongoing negotiations between Christian and non-Christian Naga. How did this idealization of Christian homogeneity come about? By focusing on one of the many Naga peoples, known as the Angami Naga, I look at relations between Christians and non-Christians and how this division is expressed through their respective religions and healing practices. Those Angami practising ancestral worship are known as *Krūna*, while Christians are known as *Kehou-mia*. This book explores persisting traditional animistic beliefs, rituals and healing, and compares them with contemporary healing as practised by the followers of various Christian denominations. In doing so it examines the continuity of certain beliefs as well as the recent revival of some cultural traditions against a background of extensive Christianity. Such coexistence of belief and practice cannot be wholly explained in terms of religious syncretism. Indeed, the concept of syncretism here begs rather than answers questions, such as whether we are dealing with the joining together of previously separate whole traditions or with a mixture of elements variously drawn from the two religions, and whether such syncretism is recognized by people themselves. Christian and non-Christian are rather to be understood as two broad alternating streams of discourse, the one masking the other but at different times and in different guises. They are part of and only comprehensible through a history of the region, whose peoples have in different situations and times taken on cultural identities during this process of social and political change. Peoples' perceptions of their own cultural distinctiveness, their resultant cultural demarcations and essentialisms, and their preparedness to adopt and transform different presentations of themselves is therefore by no means a phenomenon associated only with late-twentieth-century global developments, but has happened before.

A historical insight into the introduction of Christianity in Naga Hills informs us of the strategies missionaries had to use to gain a foothold in the area; the disagreements and debates within the mission and between missionaries and the Naga, and those between the missionaries and the British political officers regarding 'tampering' with indigenous ways of living. Historical