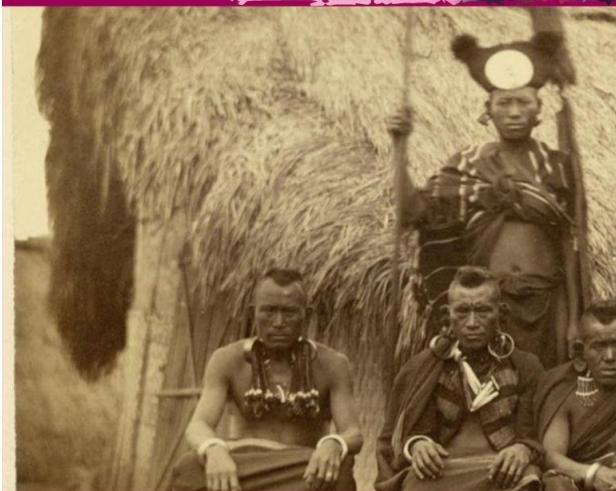




# The Birth of Christianity in Nagaland



## 1. Introduction

The Naga people originally came from Mongolia race. The Naga tribes are generally full of folklore. They are fond of seasonal songs, solo, duet and choric. In the era of forefathers fighting (head hunters) was a part of their lives and nature all the time. The people are strongly built, simple, honest, and hard working. In the following in this brief paper we will be digging little deeper and help us to understand better of the background of Nagas, the genesis and the standards of Christian, and also present scenario of Christianity.

## 2. The Word Naga

Since the Nagas doesn't have their own settled manuscript or literature, so we don't have an exact root translation of its meaning. The word Naga was first occurred in the Buranjis, the officially compiled chronicles of the Ahoms.<sup>1</sup> Though the origin of the word Naga has many theories of the word Naga derives from the word 'Nag' meaning 'Snake'. In a meanwhile according to J. H. Hutton, the word derives from the word Naga meaning 'mountaineer', 'Mountainous', or 'Inaccessible place'. But on the other hand other writers support the theory that the word 'Naga' simple means 'people' which is derive from the root word 'Nog' or 'Nor' both meaning 'people' in the language of some Eastern Naga tribes.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Origin of Nagas

When the world was seem like infant people migrated and lived one place to another place according to their survival of lives. In this era of travelling from one place to another, the Nagas too shafting from here and there and came to the place of Naga' Hills by crossing many hills and valleys. And since there was no written record there are several stories and oral traditions which passed on from one generation to generation in regards to the origin of Nagas. However, one thing is very common which people agree and find a place to believe it. Nagas have come from the Eastern part of the world, from the race of Mongolea in the era 10-12<sup>th</sup> century BC. According to E.A. Gait "all Nagas belong to the Tibeto-

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<sup>1</sup> Ahoms were one community in Assam. They originally belongs to a Tai race, and had entered to Assam from Burma through the land of the Eastern Nage.

<sup>2</sup> M. Horam, *Naga Polity*, (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1975), 21-23.

Chinese” and came to the place called Meikhel<sup>3</sup>, Naga’ Hills.<sup>4</sup> Different tribes have different version regarding the spread of Nagas at Maikhel, but all the tribes have similar story because mostly all the Naga tribes point to Maikhel in regards to the origin.<sup>5</sup>

The Nagas are blessed and rich with many natural organic things and surrounded by beautiful mountains. Many non-Nagas believes that Nagas as one tribe which is a wrong notion. There are more than 32 tribes which distributed in the territories of Nagaland State, Naga’ Hills. The major tribes in Nagas are Angami, Ao, Lotha, Konyak, Rengma, Sema, Sangtam, Chang, Chakesang, Tangkul, Kabui, Maram, Maring, Zaliang, Mao, Anal, Kharam-Monsang, Phom, Uchonphok, Makaoro, Kolyo-Kenyu, Kharam, Nockte, Pochury, YImchunger, Jeru, Jothe, Lamkan and Namshik etc. The Naga speaks different dialects, and have different customs and traditions based on the tribes.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Religion**

In the era of forefathers, Nagas were purely Animistic. In a meanwhile Nagas believed God the Creator of the heaven and the earth. They believed in the existence of a Supreme Being who is the Creator.<sup>7</sup> According to the system of worship in those days, worship was no specific or had form of worship style. Their whole lives were gripped by the authority of the nature of the superstitious and animistic worship.<sup>8</sup> The Nagas also believed in the existence of evil spirit whom they attempt to reconcile by offering sacrifices. In those era stones are an important object of worship. Some spirits are believed to reside in them and most villages have a spirit of stone.<sup>9</sup> However in times of prayer the Nagas’ addressed in supreme God the creator of heaven and the earth.<sup>10</sup>

#### **5. Christianity in Nagaland**

##### **1. Foreign Missionaries**

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<sup>3</sup> It is a small village between the Mao and Maram areas around 10 miles from South-East of the Kohima Town. Once Nagas were settle in one place i.e Maikhel, and from there all the tribes departed to their own way. Some went to East, some West, some North, and some South of Nagaland.

<sup>4</sup> M. Horam, *Naga Polity*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1977), 7.

<sup>6</sup> M. Horam, *Naga Polity*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1977), 178.

<sup>8</sup> Myingthung T. Kikon, *Formulating a Relevant Theology of Justice to the Loth Nage in the Light of Amos*, (Urappakkam, Chennai: Jubilee Memorial Bible College, 2013), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Prakash Singh, *Nagaland*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1977), 179-80.

<sup>10</sup> Myingthungo T. Kikon.

When Nagas were still Animinis, the gospel of Christ came to Naga Hills through the American Baptist Mission (ABM). The American missionary by a name Rev. Miles Bronson worked among Nagas from about 1842-1852 along with Assamese called Goghula.<sup>11</sup> He taught them Christianity and the art of cultivating tea, then Bronson opened a school at Namsang in the Konyak area in the border of Assam. But after some months sadly Bronson had to leave Naga Hills due to health crisis.<sup>12</sup>

After Bronson left Naga Hills, another missionary called Rev E. W. Clark arrived in Nagaland in 1872 and settle in a Naga village near Amguri. Within couple of months he was able to influence people and the societies surrounded him and on September 12, 1847 Hube, a Konyak Naga, was baptized as the first Naga convert. But he died shortly after his baptism on October 10, 1847. After couple of years Longjanglepzüik the first Ao Naga convert from Merangkong village was baptized on 7 September 1851 by Rev. S. W. Witting. Missionaries continued to spread the gospel in the surround villages and in April 1872 around Nine Aos came to new faith and testified their publicly.<sup>13</sup> After some months of Clark coming, he began to write Ao's dictionary, a catechism, a hymn book and translated the Gospel of Matthew and John. Then the foreign missionaries started new strategy, establishing schools in several places to give education to the Nagas as well as to teach the Bible. In the school Bible was the text book. Later, large number of Nagas accepted Jesus and began new lives.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Growth of Christianity

The foreign missionaries had sowed the word of God into the heart of Nagas though the response of the people to the gospel was several manners but then the response was positive. When Naga's understood a bit about the light of Christ and in a short time Church was established throughout every tribal. In a new born stage some Church building was built under trees or and some were gather in houses for fellowship.<sup>15</sup> Early Nagas'

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<sup>11</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *Indian Christianity; An Alternate Reading*, (Mokokchung, Nagaland: Clark Theological College, 2016), 98.

<sup>12</sup> H. K. Barpujari, *The American Missionaries and North-East India 1836-1900 AD*, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, N.Yrs), 234-6.

<sup>13</sup> Prakash Singh, *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 20, Issue 4, Ver. IV (Apr. 2015), PP 13-17 e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845.*

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 184-5.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. V. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics*, (Kohima, Nagaland: Vision Press, 1986), 61-63.

Christian was simple believers but then they began to experience a new spiritual phenomenal when the Spirit of God visited the Churches. The Holy Spirit began to work in a very dynamic way among the Nagas. The spiritual awakening known as revival had totally changed the Nagas. In the series of revival movement or spiritual awakening Nagas turned to Christian faith individually or whole society.<sup>16</sup>

By 1950 a strong mass awakening activated to all Nagas tribes. Nagas Churches were crowded every day for fasting and praying was continued days after days.<sup>17</sup> The number of Nagas Christian population is increasing rapidly with high church attendance both in rural and urban areas. We also see that many Churches are reconstructed and enlarged from time to time because of the spiritual revival, conferences, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Therefore the whole Naga community was reconciled. By the time when the Spirit of God works in the hearts of the Nagas many broken homes were reconciled and reunited. Hurt feelings of friend were renewed their friendship. And because of the work of the Holy Spirit Nagaland had become Christian state.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand during those era Nagas were in the battle for freedom, so even the Christian struggled a lot. However, after long struggle the Nagas held meeting on June 1982 at Kohima for the re-affirmed to abide and co-operated with the Church and to show respect to the Church and to God.<sup>20</sup>

### **i. Baptist Church**

Ever since the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Naga's hills was brought by the American Baptist Missionaries most of the Nagas are Baptist background. For better understanding and building up of the Nagas the Baptist churches came one umbrella call Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC). The NBCC is consisting of all the Baptist associations in all the tribes.<sup>21</sup> After the huge revival took place in Naga Hills, the Spirit of the Lord moved the hearts of the people and lot of changes happened. In the result of the revival a Home Mission Board was formed in 1960 as the Mission and Evangelistic wing of the Nagaland

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. V. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics*, 63-64.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tokavi V. Sumi, *Christianity in Nagaland*, Degree of Thought Tetso College, Service for Excellence, January 31. 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Rev. V. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics*, 65-66.

<sup>20</sup> Rev. V. K. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics*, (Kohima, Nagaland: Vision Press, 1986), 186.

<sup>21</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland\\_Missionary\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland_Missionary_Movement). Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

Baptist Church Council.<sup>22</sup> Later, in the year 1979 the name Home Mission Board was changed to Nagaland Mission Movement.<sup>23</sup> The NMM is an indigenous mission organization. Almost all the support and resources come from the local affiliated congregations and associations. NMM extended their works to reach out the unreached to give hope to the hopeless, to strengthen the weak in the name of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

## ii. Roman Catholic Church

The first Catholic missionary to enter Nagaland was Fr. Marcellinus Molz, a German from Bondashil who reached Tamlu in the Phom, Longleng District in 1908. He stayed with the Aos for some time to get acquainted with this tribe and to explore the possibility of introducing Catholic mission work among them.<sup>25</sup> However, he was unable to do mission work, British doesn't allow other Christian sects into Nagaland. Meanwhile, the Baptists were not at all pleased to have the Catholic missionaries in Nagaland.<sup>26</sup>

It was only after the Independence of India, the Catholic Church could work and on 31 December 1948, Sisters Margarita Cifre and Guadalupe reached Kohima accompanied by one John, a Naga boy who had studied in Shillong. And Bars was the first resident Catholic priest in Nagaland. And from 1948 onwards Catholic Church began to exist in Nagaland and the first Catholic Church was established at Khoima (Angamies) then Wokha (Lothas). Catholic established several educational institutions that create new philosophy, culture of the public.<sup>27</sup> Presently Catholics are found in significant numbers in parts of Wokha district and Kohima district as well as in the urban areas of Kohima and Dimapur.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *The Morung Express*, May 1 2015. <http://morungexpress.com/genesis-of-nagaland-missions-movement-nmm-missions-week-1-7-may/> Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Rev. V. K. Nuh, *Nagaland Church and Politics*, (Kohima, Nagaland: Vision Press, 1986), 64.

<sup>24</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland\\_Missionary\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland_Missionary_Movement). Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>25</sup> <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/48833/8/08%20chapter%202.pdf>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>26</sup> <http://navrangindia.blogspot.in/2015/10/naga-head-hunters-and-daring-christian.html>. Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>27</sup> M. M. Thomas, *The Nagaland Towards A.D. 2000*, (Madras, Haddows Road: Centre for Research on New International Economic Order, 1992), 114.

<sup>28</sup> <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/48833/8/08%20chapter%202.pdf>. Accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

### iii. Revival Church

Even after the foreign missionaries leave the Naha Hills, Holy Spirit continued to work among the Nagas. And the period between 1950s and 1960s great revival took place in Nagaland and the entire Nagaland became Christian state. However, on the other hand denominations also arise within Christian. The Nagaland Christian Revival Church formed in 1962, grew out of the initial phase of this movement. It had its origin in a village in Kohima district where, in 1962, an event known as "The Great Awakening started. The revival emphasised believers having a personal encounter with Christ, the witnessing of signs and wonders (such as miraculous healings), and having a missionary outreach to non-believing or nominally-Christian Nagas.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. Present Christianity

In the genesis of Christianity in Nagaland, majority of Nagas were Baptist because the coming of Foreign Baptist Missionary. But later different denominations started to insert in Naga Hills. But even date Baptist constituting more than 75% of the state's population. And then follow by Roman Catholics, Revivalists, and Pentecostals are the other Christian denomination numbers.<sup>30</sup> In present scenario Nagaland Mission Movement is to enlisting 10,000 missionaries for the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, Go into the world and preach the Gospel. Today the NMM has missionaries in many parts of India and beyond. Wherever missionaries are sent, a mission field is established and churches are planted. Some of the areas where the NMM gives more focus in today's mission within India include the Bhutan–India border, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha, Assam, the Andaman and Nicobar Island, Manipur, Tripura and West Bengal. The NMM has also sent missionaries to countries like Nepal, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and Africa.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>[https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoyvizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Christianity\\_in\\_Nagaland.html](https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoyvizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Christianity_in_Nagaland.html). Accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *Indian Christianity; An Alternate Reading*, (Mokokchung, Nagaland: Clark Theological College, 2016), 101.

<sup>31</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland\\_Missionary\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland_Missionary_Movement). Accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 2017.

## 6. Critical Analysis

The coming of foreign missionaries to Naga Hills had opened the eyes of the people to see God more clearly. Nagas were totally transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit. The coming of Christianity in Nagaland have changed in ever areas viz, traditions, beliefs, and lifestyle. However, on the other hand when Christianity was introduced with the people, Nagas were compelled to leave their own traditions, and asked to adopt foreign environment. And therefore Nagas have lost many good practices in the era of olden days.

One interesting things is as Jesus had commended to His disciples to go and reach out the people in making disciples (Matt 28:19-20) presently, NMM is sending several missionaries in many places. At the same time lately, many denominations are coming up and that create lot of crises within Churches. Churches are becoming more like competitive to one another. Church gives more priority to the outward appearance, rather than winning souls and spiritual grow. This is dangerous issue in Nagaland, because the more people looks on materials that much they will feel envy. Nagas have failed to produce responsible and genuine Christians who take up their cross daily and follow Christ.

Nagas has lost honesty and hardworking. Nagas have lost the fear of God. Nagas have failed to equip the people with the word of God which to lead them to produce a lifestyle to see the beauty of Christ in their lives. Music is a lifestyle of Nagas and they love worshipping God through singing, praying and preaching, but not applying in life, and this is what the word of God condemn (Romans 2:17-24).

“But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Nagas become religious hypocrites. Nagas have produced many ‘begging’ and became Christians’ who always ask God to give them again and again but never do their part. Day by day the faiths of the Nagas are fading away. Nagas are influencing more and embracing by the beauty of this world rather than the beauty of Christ. Nagas become like Judas who betrayed His Master Jesus Christ. So, Nagas must realize that God has done the best for them through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nagas are really in need of revival fire like in the era of 1960s and 70s.

## **7. Conclusion**

We have vividly seen of the above discussion, so now to sum up the discussion in brief. We have seen Nagas had a long journey to settle Naga Hills, and interestingly even before the coming of the Christianity worshipped the God, creator. The Nagas were brave people and deeply religious people. Christianity did not make the Nagas religious, nor did Christianity bring God to Nagas. God was there before the arrival of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity did not even identify God for the Nagas. The Nagas had already identified Him. What Christianity did was to clarify the Nagas view of God, that God own self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Naga people were fully changed because the work of the Holy Spirit. One interesting thing we see is the work of NMM, sending missionaries to various parts of the India, and beyond. In a meanwhile, Nagas have lost the spirit of revival period (1950-60s).

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