

## Changing Khezha Culture, Christianity and Women: Some Observations

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Most of us are aware that times have changed, especially when we compare our lives with those of our parents. Because cultural change is selective several aspects of traditional culture are found even today.

This paper is an attempt to describe changing culture, Christianity and women in Khezhakenoma village of Nagaland. It addresses the role of Naga women in general and the role of Christian women in particular. The Khezhas are part of the tribe called Eastern Angamis. It was in 1978 that the Chokri, Khezha and the Sangtam came together under a new identity called Chakhesang. Some years later, the Sangtams broke away from the Chakhesang identity and reverted to their previous identity as Sangtam.

Christianity represents one of the oldest forces of cultural change in India dating since about the time of Christ himself when one of His Apostles, St. Thomas, is believed to have come to India in the First century AD and preached the gospel to the people of South-western coast of India. Since then, Christianity passed through eventful history and witnessed the advent of a number of denominations which have been influencing the life and culture of Indian people, initially confined to a few high castes of South India in a small geographical area, and later to lowly castes or tribes living in isolated areas.<sup>1</sup> It is represented as a moral force that influences individuals. Christian belief does not shape the public sphere directly, but inhabits and informs private worlds, creating only indirectly a public world of enlightened laws and legitimate authority. Because the influence of Christianity is essentially moral, it did not pose any political challenge to colonial rule. Hence, the distrust of some colonial authorities on the missionaries is unfounded.<sup>2</sup>

Of all the modern forces of change, Christianity occupies one of the oldest and most influential positions as far as tribal societies in India are concerned. Unfortunately, anthropological works relating to cultural change among the tribes are few and far between. One of the most perceptible remarks in the context of the Nagas has been made by Verrier Elwin, who wrote, 'conversion to Christianity has made other changes: the stress on personal salvation has introduced a new individualism in the place of the former community spirit.'<sup>3</sup>

### **Women and Traditional Religion**

To develop a better insight into religious status of the Khezha women of Khezhakeno village, I shall examine the traditional religious status of women. While doing so I shall pay due attention to their role in religious activities.

#### ***Belief in Gods and Spirits***

Among the people of Khezhakeno village, many salutary words of reverence refer to supernatural beings. When they make sacrifices, they use the word *Chūkechi-o* meaning 'creator'. The 'god of the sky' is considered to be male and superior to the god below, which is considered to be a female. However, it should be noted that these are only terms of reference for the creator and no particular form of worship exists to please him. The Khezhhas traditionally have a firm belief in the existence of spirits. They believe that the sacred forests in the village are occupied by spirits and thus the existence of rules to be followed in the forests. Violation of such rules is believed to entail ailments and epidemics unless the angry spirits are propitiated and pacified with sacrifices. They also believe in the existence of ghosts, which are called *romi* in Khezha dialect. These ghosts are divided into two kinds: while some are considered as good and helpful, others are considered to be bad and revengeful. There is a profound belief in omens of all sorts. No journey is undertaken unless it is ascertained through omen that the journey will be successful.

#### ***Myth About Women***

Traditionally, women are held in high esteem, and this can be inferred from the myths that are dedicated to women, some of which are described below:

*Dze-o*

It is believed that the creator used a woman by the name Dze-o as a foreteller for the welfare of the village.

*Tarünie-o*

A woman by this name is also believed to be a foreteller of the future. She is also believed to possess the power of bringing rain. Before her death, she had told the villagers that in case of drought, they should come to her grave and sing:

*Tarüdzedze  
Ishenono Eshenono  
Solhuo le medzusa phabou*

She had also told that the power could be rejuvenated by performing some rituals over her tomb-stone. The ritual is to be performed by a male. It is believed that when he sings the above song and pours water over the tomb-stone it starts to rain. A song is also composed on her power:

*Tarünie-o  
Thuke chiro kale  
Ake chiro kale  
Avüdzü dewu*

Thus, her tomb-stone is used for certain rituals.

*Nyiepi-o*

Women are believed to own *Nyiepi-o* (the spirit of wealth and riches). They are also credited to have the ability to see such a spirit. Some of the women are believed to have seen *Nyiepi-o* like Keviechü-o, w/o Teirilhou Pfhüdzü and Zonie-o, w/o of Michirodzü.

On the one hand there are such myths dedicated to women signifying their high status, on the other hand some of the proverbs show that they are not held in high esteem by their male counterparts. For instance *Chügwa kikhe chi-o mo, vo gwa kikhe chi* means by law dogs cannot be fenced, but pigs have to be fenced. Here dogs refer to males and pigs to females. This signifies the subordination of women within the confinement

of their customary laws. Another proverb *Chilosü chemo, Chilosü nitsümi lu bakeliebi* means weather cannot be predicted for it is like a woman's heart. The meaning conveyed is that women are not firm in their decision and are not committed to their word and therefore, cannot be trusted. In short, this demeans her status.

### *Village Priest (Mawo) and the Priestess (Mawopi)*

Nagas are traditionally animists and in animism a specialist acts as the mediator between the supernatural and human beings. He performs all sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies pertaining to religious aspects. The village priest is referred to as *Mawo* and the village priestess as *Mawopi* in the Khezha dialect. As the wife of *Mawo*, she commands a great respect. In certain situations, she enjoys the power of *Mawo*. Such instances can be drawn from the administrative power she held—the power to convene village clan elders' meetings, assuming the charge of the *Mawo* in the event of the latter's death and if their son is still a minor. But in the event of *Mawo* having no male issue, the *Mawoship* is handed down to his nearest male lineage member, and never to her daughter, which speaks volumes on the strong existence of patriarchal values.

Whatever be her religious role, she is highly respected. She performs the harvest rituals. In this, in the order of rituals, she is the first to cut paddy, thus announcing the onset of harvest. Her prestige as the priestess is also signified by her dress code. She wears a white shawl called *likütsüra* meaning the shawl of the buffalo head, thus symbolizing her high status. In the traditional society buffalo head is held prestigious and meritorious. The *Mawopi* wears this shawl by tying the two ends around the front part of her neck.

Despite her prestige as *Mawopi* she never enjoys equal or higher status than her husband. The fact that she is prohibited from remarrying and that she cannot inherit the priest's power indicates her lower status. In the event of her remarriage, she loses her position as *Mawopi* though no punishment is imposed on her. On the other hand, a *Mawo* can remarry if widowed.

### *Ritual and Ceremonies Relating to Life Cycles*

The Nagas have a number of rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies. An attempt is made in the following to highlight the religious status of Khezha women on the basis of the same.

### ***Birth Ceremony***

Traditionally when a mother gives birth she sleeps on a bare plank for three days. She cooks in a new oven and new pots, eats in a new plate and drinks in a new cup. On completion of the third day, she preserves those utensils in a particular place. The birth ceremony is performed with a fowl and some sacrificial leaves collected from the forest. The baby is then given a bath on a small tub. The whole ceremony is performed by women only. Cooking in a new oven or a new pot symbolises the arrival of the new baby. The use of a new oven, pot, plate and cup signifies the undefiled materials used for the new born thus invoking good health, prosperity and long life to the new born baby. If a son is born, a cock is killed and if a daughter is born, a hen is killed. It is believed that such meat gives instant nutrition to the mother. After completion of a year, the mother kills a fowl and performs rituals. On that particular day, the mother performs only domestic works. This is due to the belief that if the mother attends to works outside the house, *romi* (spirit) will afflict the new born baby.

### ***Name Giving Ceremony***

On this auspicious day, traditionally a fowl is killed and the thighs of the fowl are given to the children. Ceremonies are performed and observed before a name is given to the new born child. A sacrificial leaf is torn into two halves and dropped on the ground. If the leaf turns upper side, it is considered a good omen and the name of the baby is pronounced. On the other hand, if the leaf falls on the ground on the opposite side, it is considered a bad omen and the name giving ceremony is postponed to some other day. After the child is named, he is carried around the house by a boy if the baby is a boy and by a girl if a girl signifying the child has been named. The carrying by a boy or a girl conveys the sex of the new born child without having to announce the same. In the naming ceremony, all rituals are performed by the father whereas the mother is not assigned any role during the naming ceremony. However, whether a son or a daughter, the naming ceremony is conducted ceremonially denoting no prejudice to the female baby in the naming ceremony.

### ***Marriage Ceremony***

On the day of the wedding, the bride has to undergo many rituals. She

brings with her a basket of rice-beer covered with a white cloth. She is accompanied by two girls one of whom, on reaching the house of the bridegroom, enters first. The bride then enters the house by stamping her feet on the ground. The people seated in the groom's house receive her with cheers. After this, the people are served with the rice beer she had brought with her. The newly married couple then undergoes a period of rest for three days. During these three days, they sleep on separate beds. It is only after all rituals are completed do they share the bed as wife and husband.

### *Separation*

The ultimate ritual performed in the event of a separation is that the basket (locally called *Cheh*) rope is cut off symbolizing the end of the marriage. For reunion, the husband goes to the wife's parental home and leaves a spade on the ground. Through this the separated wife understands that she is invited by her husband for reunion. If the wife disagrees to the proposal of the reunion, the spade is left behind and he goes back to his house. If the wife agrees to the proposal, they leave together for the husband's house. Though the rituals are performed by the husband, the wife has all the liberty to decide whether to agree or disagree to the reunion proposal put forth by her husband.

### *Death Ceremony*

When a person dies a fowl is killed and hung on the wall of the house with a rope till the burial of the person's dead body takes place. After burial, the fowl is removed by the same person who hangs it. This ritual can be performed by both men and women. A leaf is also sacrificed along with the fowl, which symbolises driving away of the sickness and bad omens. Before the dead body is brought out of the house for burial, with the belief of making the dead person's road bright, first a bamboo stack is lighted and kept near his place of burial. After the burial, a buffalo or a cow is killed and distributed to the villagers. Foods are also placed on the top of the burial place since they believe that the spirit of the dead person comes and eats them. In case the deceased person is a man, spear and other weapons are buried along or hung on the grave, while for a woman, her walking stick (called *koshükuthu* in Khezha dialect) is buried with her. The fact that same rituals are performed irrespective of gender at the time of burial denotes that females enjoy an equal status in the society.

### **Rituals Relating to Agriculture**

Agriculture is traditionally the main source of livelihood for the people and as such, many festivals are celebrated for abundance of harvest. In so far as agriculture is concerned she is equal to her male counterpart. The belief of owning *Nyiepi-o* gives her more advantage over her male counterpart. The rituals relating to agriculture are discussed under the following heads:

#### ***Sowing***

Before sowing, women traditionally have to fast. This is observed for fear of the spirit whose anger may destroy the crops sown. This is performed exclusively by women, and they are also managers of the granary. Sowings are done early in the morning, after which they enjoy *Zuso* (rice beer).

#### ***Harvest***

Three days' fasting precede the harvest ceremony. This is observed for good harvest by women. On the fourth day, a small patch of the field is first harvested, which signifies the onset of harvest. The Mawopi is given the privilege of first cutting the paddy.

#### ***Granary***

All the rituals and ceremonies relating to granary are under the exclusive control of the wife, and therefore, she is rightly called the manager of the household. When the harvest is first brought home, the mother of the family offers prayer to the Almighty, the creator, for bestowing blessings upon the family with food grains. It is only after this that the new grains are kept in the barn/granary for storage. She performs another ritual when the new paddy is taken out for cooking. The first cooking is done on a new pot which is specially marked for the occasion. The cooking has to be done in a new hearth. In the event of a family having no surviving mother, the rituals and ceremonies are performed by the eldest daughter of the family. Thus it appears that women enjoyed a respectable place and played a very significant role in as far as economic activities are concerned.

## Rituals Relating to Festivals

Festivals form an integral part of the Khezhas. They are fond of festivals, which are always accompanied by feasts. During the festivals they dance and sing till late night. Different tribes in Nagaland have different festivals on different occasions. Over 90 per cent of the Naga population are dependent on agriculture; and as such, most festivals centre around agriculture. Apart from merry-making, a festival is also a time for prayer for the bountiful harvest, and they pray to their different supreme beings uttering and calling out different names with reverence—*Gawang* by Konyaks, *Tsüngrem* by Aos, *Alhou* or *Timilhuo* by Semas and so on.

Different tribes have different festivals: Angamis = Sekrenyi (25th February), Aos = Moatsü (1st May), Chakhesangs-Likhenyie (24th April) and Sükhrünyie (15 January), Changs = Naknyulem (29-31st July), Khamniungans = Tsoküm (1st week of October), Konyaks = Aoleang Monyu (1-6th April), Lothas = Tokhu Emong (7th November), Phoms = Monyu (1st week of April), Pochurys = Yemshe 1st week of October), Rengmas = Ngada (last week of November), Sumis = Tuluni (July), Sangtams = Amongmong (1st week of September), Yimchungrus = Metemniu (4-8th August), Zeliangs = Meileinyi/Hega/Langsimnyi/Chegagadi (February, March, October).

Music is an indispensable part of all festivals. During festivals, young boys and girls spend hours together singing. They form groups and work together in the field. There are different songs for different festivals. Their emotions get spontaneous expression as they sing. Dance, music and food are important aspects of their festivals.

Among the Khezhas of Khezhakeno, the festivals are so much part of their life that the months are named after the festivals. The important festivals are Rünnyie (harvest festival), which is held in December, Likhenyie (festival dedicated to the youths), which is held in April, and Zatho (feast of merit), which is held in January. Many rituals and ceremonies are closely linked and associated with these festivals, of which, the roles and status of women are distinctly specified.

### *Rünnyie*

Rünnyie has been the biggest festival of the village in the pre-Christian days. This festival is held after the harvest and it lasted for about 18 days in the past. Men and women undergo a ritual before the festival starts. For instance, on the day before the festival, women traditionally shave

their hair (as the unmarried girls usually keep short hair) and wash clothes and clean the house. Men, on the other hand, take bath and cut their hair as a preparation for the festival. These activities symbolize the removal of impurities, pollution, bad luck and diseases. A pregnant woman without a husband is exiled from the village prior to the festival on account of impurities and is not restored till the baby is delivered, which indicates a low status of women. Alternatively this indicates Hindu influence, which seems quite widespread among the various Naga tribes due probably to their proximity with the Hindu Assamese.

The main highlights of the festival are drinking *Zuzo* (rice beer), eating meat and singing folk songs. On the seventh day known as the *Neto Nerii* day young boys give meat to young girls of their *khel* (hamlet). In return, the girls prepare *Topha Taori* (boys' earring made of cotton and worn while singing and dancing) and give the same to the boys of the *khel*. Women thus join the merriment. Any time during the festival young boys of one *khel* may give meat to the girls of a particular *Liizhii* (girls' dormitory) of another *khel*. In return, the young girls of the *Liizhii* invite the boys for drinks and merrymaking. The place for such gathering is usually the facade of their dormitory. They drink and sing together late into the night. However, so high is the code of morality that even showing the toes by the girls is forbidden.

During the festival, sacrifices are offered to supernatural being. The most important festival is the one in which they kill a fowl at the village gate. No one is allowed to enter the village gate during this festival for fear of the evil spirits, the entry of which was believed to bring bad luck and diseases.

Another significant feature of the festival is the *Afii*: (crooning) before the food is placed on the platform on the first day. This is done by the males only in their respective *khel* and no woman is entertained in such crooning. Cursing is part of this ceremony but it is tabooed for the female members to curse anyone.

### *Zatho*

This festival is celebrated in the month of *Zathokhrii* (January) every year. The richest man of the village throws a feast for the whole village, which enables him to earn more prestige in the village. The feast of merit however cannot be hosted if the wife has died. Prior to and during the festival, the lady of the house is bound by many rites and ceremonies. She cannot move out of the house before the festival and has to fast

during which she can only have rice beer. She occupies herself in the hectic preparation for the feast, which lasts for about seven days. On the last day of the preparation, she breaks her fast and the animal to be feasted is killed. The lady of the house is restricted from moving out of the house for fear of affliction from evil spirits to her body and wealth.

After she breaks her fast the clan members cleanse the beer cans after which they feast with meat and rice beer. On the first day of the feast, the wife opens the *Chi* (carved wooden log where the rice beer is stored) and serves the rice beer to the villagers. She offers prayer to the creator by uttering *Chii ki chi-o themepu milo*, which is an offering and prayer to bless the drinks and foods so that they do not run short of the same during the feast. The lady of the house and the husband (the host) have a dress code during this festival. They wear a white clothe known as *Liketsiira* meaning buffalo head, which is worn in such a way that it covers their heads while taking out the food and beer. Another important characteristic of the festival is the erection of a monolith on the compound of the host, which displays his prestige. The men bring the stone to the place of erection. The husband and the wife of the house, during this period, move to and fro as it is believed that the stone will not move from its place if they do not do so. The men then pull the stone while one of them says so loudly:

*Tharamo Benele*  
*Tharamo tedekha*  
*Benele beii pete*

Thus, the stone is erected symbolizing the prestige of the host.

### *Likhenyie*

This festival falls in the month of April. It is referred to as the "festival of the youth" and lasts for about six days. Nature itself adds a new life to the festival with new leaves. Though the whole village participates in the festival, the young boys and girls enjoy it the most. During this festival, only the best of male domestic animals are slaughtered for consumption. The Khezas in particular and the Nagas in general relish the male livestock and consider it to be tastier than the female livestock. New wines are prepared and the meat and other food prepared are shared with friends. Games and sports, music competition etc are organised after which feasting follows.

In the first morning of the festival, the village priest offers sacrifices with the first cock that crows that morning. Also early that morning, all men (any man who can use a spear) gather at a designated well and purify themselves by bathing. Any act not conforming to the set rules and norms is frowned at and is believed to bring bad luck to the person or the family. After the bath, they invoke the almighty for strength, long life, good harvest and other blessings. This ritual is performed by men, as they are the ones protecting the village from outsiders' attack and also the ones who go to war.

Another highlight of this festival is that after two days, the young boys and girls of the same *khel* mount the hilltops like Tshelo, Hube-o Tai khazu, Telokephe, Morontsiikopo, Tapamojo, and Chizadziio-o for collecting green tender leaves, flowers like Rhododendron and Likhenyie (flowers which bloom only during this season). Apart from this, unmarried couples collect *norho* (a type of plant) because a belief prevails that if *norho* has a single root, the unmarried couple on getting married will have no children. If it is white, they will have a daughter.

The festival ends with an invocation for blessings, after which all leisure activities are suspended and from then on they concentrate only in the activities of the fields and other related activities. With it the sowing of paddy and plantation of seeds begin. Many activities mentioned above show the participation of both girls and boys, which shows that girls are not prohibited to join the merriment.

### *Present-day Scenario*

In the village, there are five churches at present. Of the five churches, Revival and Baptist churches are headed by pastors and the Catholic Church by a Catechist, who performs the services and intervenes in the disputes and controversies regarding religious conduct. The church history, however, shows that there never was any woman pastor or catechist.

Pastors and catechists have a subordinate body of colleagues who are known as deacons. Every church has its deacons and deaconesses who help the pastors/catechist in carrying out the activities of the churches. Regarding theological studies, the past few decades show no record of female undergoing such study. Today, the Revival Church has a woman member undergoing such study. The church record reveals that four women from the Revival Church are undergoing studies in this field, which denotes that the women are not lagging far behind. According to

my field data, men and women have equal access to churches and their proceedings. They take equal part in service, discussions and other such events in the church. The women have their right to occupy the pulpit while preaching the word of God. This fact is supported by my own observation in the field where I saw women occupying the pulpit and participating in various church activities as chairpersons of the service, Bible readers, song presenters and as pianists. Besides the choir members of the church have equal representation from women.

Here, it should be noted that churches have their own affiliations. The Baptist churches are affiliated with the Chakhesang Baptist Church Council with their central office at Pfutsero, the headquarters of Phek District of Nagaland. The Revival churches are affiliated with the Nagaland Christian Revival Churches (NCRC) with its centre at Chatheba, and the Catholic Church at the parish of Pfutsero, Phek district.

### **Women Wings of Christians**

Except for the Catholic Church, all the churches have their women wings that play a significant role in the religious life of the Christians as well as welfare of the villagers. These wings are called women's societies. These societies have only women as members of the church. The membership is extended to all women who are considered as mature enough to serve the Lord. These are run by chairperson, vice-chairperson, general secretary, joint secretary along with executive members who are selected for a specific term. Their establishment and existence synchronize with the establishment of their respective churches and thus it varies from church to church.

All these societies have their separate affiliations to larger bodies. The Women's Society is affiliated with the Baptist Women's Association with its centre at Pfutsero, whereas the revival women's body is affiliated with the Chatheba centre. Regarding their activities, they have their prayer fellowships every Wednesday evening besides the normal church services. I have witnessed during my stay in the field that women actively participate in these activities despite their agricultural and domestic chores. They also fast from time to time. I witnessed one such occasion where they prayed to God for social welfare and for other activities to be pursued throughout the year. On that particular afternoon they baked local cakes, which were done for the purpose of raising funds. They also help the poor and the needy. They visit sick and elderly people, pray for them and

lend a helping hand through money or other materials for which act of kindness they receive a great deal of respect from others.

### **Christian Youth Endeavour**

Each church has its youth wing known as Christian Youth Endeavour. This body plays a major role in the activities of the church. At the apex of it lies a chairman with secretaries and executive members. Each such body is affiliated with its respective association at a higher level. It is a body of all the youth members of the church. All the youth societies have their prayer fellowships in their respective churches besides attending other church services. This body plays an important role in church activities and social work. They aid the functionaries of the churches by their relentless efforts in church festivities and other meetings held in their own churches. Both men and women work hand in hand, which implies equal enjoyment of their rights in such participation. However, the history of youth societies does not show any instance where a woman headed the office as a chairperson. They attribute this failure to the later spread of education among girls compared to the boys among the Nagas.

### **Sunday School Department**

The Sunday School department is part of the church institution where Biblical education is imparted on Sundays. The department is formed by selected teachers with a superintendent heading the department. Lady teachers are more or less equally represented. The selection of the staff is done on the basis of capability. Both the sexes have equal right to receive such education.

### **Christian Festivals**

The main festivals of the Christians are Good Friday marking the crucifixion of Christ, Easter marking the resurrection of Christ, and Christmas symbolizing the birth of Jesus Christ. Unlike Naga festivals characterized by sacrifices and rituals, the Christians offer prayers to the God and worship Him in church. Any one can participate in such occasions. Women are not restricted from entering the place of worship. The youths—men as well as women—decorate their respective churches during such festivals. A feast is organised by the church to which even the non-Christians are invited.

### **Ceremonies Relating to Life Crisis Events**

Women today prefer to go to hospitals for delivery because it is safer to do so than deliver at home, although the atmosphere in the latter is familiar and self-assuring. They take rest after delivery and take nutritious food and drinks. After some days of giving birth, the pastor of the church comes to the house and blesses the child. Christening however is done in the church. Baptism is another important occasion in the life of every Christian. Marriage marks yet another important transition in the life of women and men. It marks a fundamental status change. Christian marriage is also known as "holy marriage". Such marriage has become popular among the Khezas. Elopement and other forms of marriages are not recognized by church, which may excommunicate the guilty persons involved in such marriages.

In a Christian marriage, concerned parents inform the church and choose the day of marriage. On this auspicious day, the bride and the bridegroom, along with their parents, relatives and friends go to the church. The couple stands before the holy altar, the pastor reads scriptures, the couple takes oath and pastor announces them as married and the marriage rituals are over. A marriage feast is thrown and the guests give presents and bless the newly wed couple.

First marriage is usually celebrated with great fanfare and a big feast is thrown but a second marriage is usually a simple affair and very few people are invited to attend the same.

### **Christianity in Nagaland**

Published works on Christianity among the Nagas deal with church history, statistics on converts, or focus on evangelical strategies. There is hardly any work that is based on the believers' point of view. The believers can be viewed as people having simultaneous relationship with (1) their Gods, (2) their fellow believers, and (3) the society they live in. The developmental stages of Christianity among the Naga tribes have been traced by several scholars.<sup>4</sup> According to them, the earliest missionary input in Nagaland has been observed in the nineteenth century as carried out by the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society then operative in Assam. In subsequent years, the missionaries received the fruits of their efforts.

The early converts had to go through lots of hardships. They were looked down upon by their own relatives. Some were even driven out of

their homes and villages. But in spite of all this, they stood firm and resisted all sorts of trials and tests. Christian missionaries aimed at religious conversion of the people, which meant not only a changeover from the indigenous faith to the Christian faith, but also from oral to written religious tradition. However, the impact of Christianity was not only confined to the religious aspect of the tribal life. After the Khezhas accepted Christianity, they experienced changes in other aspects of their life as well like their festivals, organization of village, life-cycle beliefs and practices, personal and social life, ideals and aspirations, dance, dormitory, religious status of women, economic life, health and hygiene.

Besides the above changes, there are changes in the realm of ideas and attitudes. Such changes are the result of an overall change in the life of the converts due to various factors like education, modernisation, equality of sex and girls' education, greater adaptability to new situations, a better civic sense, and a higher level of aspirations.

The upliftment of Khezha Naga women's status largely depends on how women themselves accept womanhood. Christianity has become a dominant faith in the village of Khezhakeno and as such women have received greater freedom. Westernization among them cannot be separated from Christianization in the Naga context. With the advent of Christianity came western education. Western education provided them with a new outlook and network with other parts of the world. Women gained a new confidence.

Christianity grooms a person to a large extent. It helps one in one's personality development. It widens one's worldview, changes one's ways of thinking and is more exposed through different programmes and activities of the church. The church trains a person in leadership. Church services and weekly worship services give various lessons to the young and old. In every stage of a Christian's life, one gets training and education. For instance, during childhood, one goes to Sunday school, during youth one joins youth fellowship, women join the women's group, and so on. The informal education which is received in the dormitories of the past is now bestowed upon by the church. But kinship is one area which remains unchanged even after conversion. People still hold on to their bonds of kinship. Clan endogamy is still a taboo in marriage. The inheritance pattern, descent, and family structure remain the same.

Today's scenario about festivals is different from what they were in the past. Traditional festivals are still observed with great gaiety but without traditional rites and rituals. The Christians also celebrate the traditional festivals. The knowledge and ideas of the outside world is

imparted among the men and women through western education. The spread of western education has encouraged them to perform and participate in religious activities of the past without compromising with Christian faith and values.

The religious life of the Naga women in general and the Khezha women in particular is no longer confined to their homes and villages. The establishment of various religious organizations has opened a wide network with the outside world. The sense of unity as a tribe cutting across the bounds of villages has mainly been possible through the initiative of the church. At the same time, traditional beliefs and practices, which the Christian Nagas had abandoned in order to be 'saved' have the tendency of being revived by the converts themselves.

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