THE IMPACT OF MODERNIZATION ON THE NAGAS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

BREAKING THE SPELL

SUBMITTED TO STEVE YBARROLA, PH.D
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1. Introduction

In late December of 2010, I had an opportunity to visit my hometown, Dimapur. Dimapur is the economic hub of Nagaland and is also called the gateway of Nagaland (situated in the North Eastern part of India bordering Myanmar in the east). One afternoon as I spent time with my nephews in an unkempt park, which is nothing unusual, I came across a young teenager. He caught my attention in the first place because of his melancholic outlook. As I looked at him more closely, he appeared to me to be a cool fashion punk. He was wearing hipster\(^1\) denim with converse canvas shoes and sporting a spiky hairstyle while holding a mobile. That teenager resembles any young ultra-fashionable person in any metropolitan city in the world.

Immediately, a number of thoughts rushed through my mind: how is Naga culture evolving? What does his dress code mean to him? Or is it just mere en vogue? Where did he get the money for the attire?\(^2\) Will the word of God be appealing to him? How is the church reaching out to him? These thoughts will be at the back of my mind as I write this paper.

The arm of modernity is far-reaching, having an impact that is lasting and life-changing. It seems unnecessary to state that modernity has deeply touched the Nagas—the once head-hunting tribes who lived in remote hilly areas.\(^3\) Today, the Nagas, particularly the youths, are

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\(^1\)Hipsters represent a subculture of young, recently settled urban middle class adults and older teenagers with musical interests mainly in alternative rock.

\(^2\) It should be noted that unemployment in Nagaland is high and the chasm of economic disparity is expanding progressively. Shanben Kithan, “In the Pursuit of employment and equality: A Hindsight View,” Nagaland Post 19\(^{th}\) Oct, 2011. Another local daily Morung Express published an article “Unemployment in Nagaland—Myth or Reality?” which pointed out that in official record there are 55,000 unemployed in Nagaland. However, it also mentioned that this number is conservative in assessment. See www.morungexpress.com/frontpage/54262.html - India.

\(^3\) See below my discussion on the Nagas.
well connected with global popular culture through media (Hollywood, Bollywood, Korean movies, and newspapers), and the internet. However, the melancholic outlook of the teenager looms amongst the Nagas. Corruption is rampant in the society, unemployment is high, infrastructure of the state is in shambles, and the dreadful sense of not knowing from where they came, where they are at present, and where they are heading make many desperate for something more.

The impact of modernization appears to have created a desperate and mediocre Naga society. This is what Henry Balfour, an anthropologist and the first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, said in 1923 after his brief visit to the British colonized Naga Hills:

We must always bear in mind that tampering with long-established and deeply-rooted customs is apt to be dangerous, and although the ideal aimed at may be perfectly sound from our point of view, the metamorphic results arrived at may prove disappointment and very different to those which theory leads us to expect.

In this case Balfour has been prophetic in his analysis. Words such as “dangerous” and “disappointing” are the reality of the present 21st century Nagas.

This paper is an attempt to analyze what went wrong with the Nagas and suggest ways for the Naga churches to respond. These are broad questions that require more time and space than this current paper can address. Nonetheless, these questions are too crucial to leave aside.

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4 The teenager’s melancholic outlook is voiced out by an anonymous lady who laments about the existing dilemma of Naga Culture. See “Interview with a Young Naga Woman,” in Naga Identities: Changing Local Cultures in the Northeast of India (ed., Michael Oppitz et al; Gent: Snoeck Publishers, 2008), 418-422.
5 Al Ngulie a local journalist writes a satire about Naga corruption, specifically relating to a backdoor appointment for a government job that creates almost a paralyzed society. See Morung Express, “Nagas in Many Bad Words Ho, na?” 30th Nov, 2011.
7 It should be noted that Balfour represents the British social anthropology that emphasizes the modernistic evolutionist concept of civilization. Ibid., 57.
Therefore, I will answer the questions by strictly limiting myself to the issue of the impact of modernization on the Nagas so as to be able to construct a theological response that is relevant and effective for the present Nagas. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part of the paper will briefly highlight my methodological approach and define Nagas and “modernization” and their development. The second part will analyze the agents and impact of modernization amongst the Nagas. The third and final part of the paper will propose a theological response for the present Naga reality.

2. Section I

2.1. Methodological Consideration

From the outset it must be mentioned that the arguments made in this paper are not based on fieldwork study. However, as the author, I am a bona fide citizen of Nagaland who has over three decades of experience in Naga society, making this study a “reflexive anthropology.” In other words, this is a self/emic critical evaluation of one’s own cultural context. The chief goal is to understand my context better in order to make the Gospel relevant. Apart from my own experience as a teacher and chaplain in Nagaland, I will gather information from local dailies, interviews, and from pertinent secondary resources.

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9 For more than six decades Nagas have been engaged in a movement of self-determination. In the course of this arm resistance movement Nagas have undergone complex consequences in the society. Although this paper will not touch this issue I believe “modernization” and its impact have weakened this movement. Hence, dealing with the issue of modernization and its impact might have implication on levels of the Naga society.

10 M.J. Fisher argues that the primary function of anthropology is culture critique, particularly the critique of Western cultures. See George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fisher, Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Monument in Human Sciences (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986); see also Anselma Gallinat, “Playing the Native Card: The Anthropologist as Informant in Eastern Germany” in The Ethnographic Self as Resource: Writing Memory and Experience into Ethnography (eds., Peter Collins and Anselma Gallinat; New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 25-44.
I also take a cue from Clifford Geertz, who avers that anthropology—the study of humans—cannot be merely reduced to pure scientific observation.\textsuperscript{11} This does not mean discarding the \textit{etic} study but it does mean making room for both \textit{etic} and \textit{emic} perspectives to interact with one another. In light of this, the current paper is not a mere subjective imagination of the given issue but an interactive interpretation of anthropological analysis that provides a context for meaningful theologizing.

2.2. Who are the Nagas?

The Nagas consist of 47 tribes who are spread over the current states of India: Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and North-West Myanmar.\textsuperscript{12} This separation of the Nagas into different artificial boundaries is a result of British colonization, which was later exacerbated by India and Myanmar.\textsuperscript{13} However, in this paper I will focus on the Nagas of the Nagaland.

The word “Naga” is a generic term that is employed to describe the 47 odd tribes. There is no one definition of the term Naga.\textsuperscript{14} Some say that this word originated from the neighboring Assamese word \textit{naga} or the Hindusthani word \textit{nanga}, meaning naked. Some non-Naga scholars attribute this name to the Sanskrit word \textit{nag} which means either mountain or snake. Still some

\textsuperscript{12} The following are the Naga tribes identified and located:
\textbf{In Nagaland State}: Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Kalya Kongnuyu, Khiamungan, Konyak, Kyong, Liangmei, Pochury, Phom, Rengma, Rongmei, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchunger, and Zemei.
\textbf{In Arunachal Pradesh}: Nocte, Tangsha and Wancho.
\textbf{In Assam}: Some Rengmas, Rongmei and Zemei live in Assam.
\textsuperscript{13} When the British left India in 1947, they left the Nagas divided among India and Burma. In India, Nagas areas were put under the administrative control of Assam. Later, when Nagaland state was created in 1963, the Nagas were further dissected into different states of Northeast India.
\textsuperscript{14} See also Angeline Lotsüro, \textit{The Nagas: A Missionary Challenge} (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 2000), 4-5.
Nagas think that this word is derived from a local word nok, meaning people. Others say that it is derived from the Burmese word Naka, meaning pierced ears, which is also closely related to Konyak Naga language, Na means ear and ka means hole. Although it is true that the Naga ancestors, both male and female, had pierced ear as a way to decorate themselves, one cannot be absolutely certain about its original meaning. It is also argued that the earliest mention of the word Naga is found in the Greek philosopher Claudius Ptolemy’s Geographia, who wrote as early as 150 A.D. on the so called land of the “Nangalothae” north of Cirradia [Eastern Nepal].

The word Nangalothae is translated as naked, and the present Nagaland is close to Nepal. This made some to infer that Ptolemy was talking about the Nagas. In spite of this plethora of suggestions, one cannot be certain of what this word exactly means and whether it has a local or outside origination.

The origin of the Naga people themselves is also little known. Linguistically the Nagas’ languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. British anthropologists such as Hutton and Mills have speculated about the origin of the Nagas. Hutton suggests, “They have been connected with the head-hunters of Malay and the races of the Southern Seas on the one hand, and traced back to China on the other.” Mills expresses that the Nagas must have migrated from Oceania and the Indonesia-Philippine island arc. But again this issue of the origin of Nagas is shrouded in mystery.

Another aspect that has generated some debate over the years is concerning primordialism versus constructionism of ethnicity. The issue is whether the Nagas are one

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17 Mills, The Ao Nagas, xii.
18 Primordialism: “Ethnicity is a primal condition, such as a ‘tribe’ (or even ‘race’), into which one is born. A form of essentialism, in the sense that it involves an ongoing, relatively unchanging group identity. Constructionism: “The dominant theoretical perspective today. Ethnicity is constructed situationally and in constant
people as is considered today or if the tribes that constitute the Nagas are in fact independent entities. Charles Chasie, a Naga author, takes the constructionist perspective and argues that the Nagas were not one people until the recent past. Some reasons for his contention are: there is no authoritative account on the numbers of Naga tribes to this day; in the past there was nothing like “Naga society,” rather all the tribes existed as village societies, each warring with the other; the term “Naga” is still subject to different interpretations (as shown above); and there is no consensus on how the Naga tribes came into being. All these reasons show that the concept of “Naga society” is a late construction formulated for political reason.¹⁹

Against Chasie’s constructionism is Abraham Lotha’s primordialist perspective. Lotha contends that there are underlying characteristics amongst all the Naga tribes that make them one society from time immemorial. Some of the chief characteristics that unite all the tribes are their similar clan system, the village morung as a place of imparting culture, the head-hunting practice, the feast of merit, and similar mythological concepts of origin.²⁰ Lotha also argues that it was the British colonizer that arbitrarily created the different tribal names that the Nagas hold today. Lotha avers, “The rigid demarcations of the ‘tribes’ as distinct identities were partly the result of classificatory investigations in the nineteenth century for administrative purposes, and an anthropological concern with the articulation of race and racial difference, with the origins and migrations of various peoples, and the relationship between these different peoples.”²¹

Although there is a tendency in the debate of primordialism and constructionism to “flatly reject” one another, in the case of the Nagas it can be argued that one can walk the middle flux. Flatly rejects primordialism.” Quoting it from Ted C. Lewellen, The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21st Century (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2002), 108.


²¹ Ibid., 48.
ground. There is no doubt that each Naga village operated as an independent republic of its own; however, there are also many common characteristic, as Lotha has argued, which indicate that they might have originated from common racial stock. Julian Jacobs, an anthropologist, opines that, “the Naga society is one society, an aggregate of communities who share a set of structures or principles in common, but who emphasize them differently.”22 Jacobs’ judgment seems to be sound in that Naga society existed and functioned within a supra social structure but each tribe had variations on their emphasis.

2.2.1. Pre-Colonial Characteristics of the Nagas

In this sub-section I will focus on the question of how the Nagas lived, subsisted, organized themselves into groups, and thought about the world and the afterlife before they were resettled, modernized, and converted to Christianity.

All the Naga tribes lived in village settings. Every village was independent of one another and predominantly run on the principles of democracy, either in the form of a republic or monarchy.23 These democratic governments were made possible because of the village morungs. Morung is in fact the life line of every village.24 It is the bachelor’s dormitory and the equivalent of the modern educational institution. However, for the Nagas, morung was more than an educational institution, it was a social institution. It was in the morung that Nagas not only learnt the cultures, values, norms, and warfare tactics of their village but it also provided the structure for the working principles of the village council. Basically, morung was instituted in a

22 Julian Jacobs, The Nagas: Hills Peoples of North East India (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 64.
23 Vashum, Nagas’ Right to Self-Determination, 14. However, the monarchial form of government is found only amongst the Konyak Nagas. Even so in many Konyak villages policies pertaining to village were made in collective manner. See Y. Chingang Konyak, The Konyak Nagas: Yesterday and Today (Dimapur: S.P. Printers, 2008), 13-18.
hierarchical fashion. The eldest group took the responsibility of teaching the younger groups as well as making important decisions. The younger lots were further divided into different age groups, such as 15 to 20, 21 to 25, and 26 to 30. All these age groups had different responsibilities until they reached the highest “eldest” group. In this way, morung provided a system for the governance of the villages.

Naga societies are patrilineal and patriarchal in nature. However, by no means were women considered as second class citizens in the village. In fact, Mills avers that in the Ao Naga tribe, hen-pecked husbands were not unknown.²⁵ Christoph Von Führer-Haimendorf also avers that, “many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of the Naga Hills, their status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of a people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as ‘savages.’”²⁶ One of the chief characteristics of the Nagas as Lotha has argued above was the practice of the “feast of merit.” This practice provides a glimpse into the communitarian aspect of the Nagas. This feast of merit was a social ceremony, in fact a series of ceremonies performed by the married man in order to uplift his and his wife’s status. It was a rite of passage from a lower status to higher status. The more a man performed this feast, the more prominent his status became in the village. Thus a man and his wife worked hard in their field to store away food in order to organize such a feast. Führer-Haimendorf explains the communitarian side of this feast while he opines: “For among the Aos [Nagas] a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending if for the benefit of the community.”²⁷ By observing this feast of merit, a man and his wife gained honor both in this life and after death.

²⁵ Mills, Ao Nagas, 211.
²⁶ Führer-Haimendorf was a student and follower of Bronislaw Malinowsky. He extensively studied the Konyak Nagas in the 1930s. Führer-Haimendorf , Naked Nagas (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & co, 1962), 101.
²⁷ Ibid., 52
bringing favor to his village and clan from the spirits. The man who observed this feast was also awarded rights of wearing certain cloths and ornaments and of decorating his house with crafts and animal skulls. The communitarian aspect of this feast of merit was portrayed prominently in the fact that the relatives of the poorest man in the society sponsored this feast on the poor man’s behalf.\textsuperscript{28} Even so, this feast was not an obligatory event.

Another common practice among the Nagas was the practice of head-hunting. The Nagas practiced head-hunting because, according to them, their enemies’ heads brought prosperity to the village directly connected to the fertility of the crops.\textsuperscript{29} Besides this, head-hunting was practiced in order to gain honor and prestige, and thus it was similar to the feast of merit.\textsuperscript{30} If an enemy’s head brought prosperity to village, then the one who chopped a head and brought it to the village would be revered. It is interesting to note here that Nagas’ practice of head-hunting had no direct relation to intentional revenge and the spirit world as seen in the violent nature of the Yanomamō, the native Indians of the Amazon rainforest in southern Venezuela.\textsuperscript{31} Yet there is similarity in the sense that both Yanomamō’s violent attacks and the Nagas’ head-hunting brought prestige and honor to the victors. Mills avers that Nagas’ villages were well-guarded both by humans and sharp bamboo fences. Moreover, Nagas’ raids were conducted as ambushes or at night, so the villagers were always on alert.\textsuperscript{32}

Gait comments that the Naga religion is uniformly animistic in nature.\textsuperscript{33} Gait further asserts that the differences one finds amongst the tribes are a matter of emphasis. He cites that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Lotha, \textit{Naga Identity}, 52.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Cf. Fürer-Haimendorf, \textit{Return to the Naked Naga} (London: John Murray, 1976), 95.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Cf. Lotha, \textit{Naga Identity}, 51-2.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Mark Andrew Ritchie, \textit{Spirit of the Rainforest: A Yanomanō Shaman’s Story} (Chicago: Island Lake, 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{32} Mills, \textit{Ao Nagas}, 200-10.
\item \textsuperscript{33} E.A. Gait, “Animism” in \textit{The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century} (edited with an introduction by Verrier Elwin; Oxford: Oxford Univeristy, 1969), 510-513. Naga religion is described by Western anthropologists and American missionaries as animism, and many local scholars take the cue from them in calling our ancestors’
\end{itemize}
the differences are rather like the ones we have in Christian denominations. In line with this, Mills avers that Ao Naga religion is not a moral code; it is a religion of ceremonies.\textsuperscript{34} The general belief of the Nagas was that there were a number of evil spirits, which needed to be propitiated lest they destroy the villagers’ crops or families. The emphasis on the spirit world can also be seen in the Nagas’ understanding of soul. For instance, the Ao Nagas believed that every human had one fate, \textit{tiya} and three souls, \textit{tanela}.\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, this fate/tiya had three souls of its own, dwelt in mid-air, and entered into human beings when an infant was born. An interesting aspect is that one of the \textit{tiya’s} souls lived in the earth with man whereas one of the man’s souls lived with \textit{tiya} in mid-air. The other two souls of the man reside with him—one in his house and the other accompanying him wherever he went. Death was caused when the man’s soul went astray to the land of death.

Apart from these commonalities amongst the Naga tribes, one other common factor that needs to be pointed out is that Nagas’ men and women were fine craftsmen and weavers. In all the Naga villages, archaeologists found poles chiseled with different animals, birds, and human faces, especially in those houses whose owners had performed the feast of merit or hunted heads. The Nagas also carved big log drums and placed them inside the \textit{morungs}. These log drums were used to make announcements to the village. Announcements of war or other emergencies and every incident had different beats. Every clan in a village had its own particular shawls and, again, men of honor had the privilege of adorning themselves with special shawls. Oppitz et al state, “…these artifacts were motivated not primarily by aesthetic considerations, but by

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  \item religion by this nomenclature. However, it has been pointed out by Tienou that words such as animism and primitive are fabricated with the Western imperial worldview that the non-Western world is archaic, connoting early stages of evolution. See Tite Tienou, “The Invention of the ‘Primitive’ a Stereotype in Mission” in \textit{Missiology: An International Review} (vol. XIX. No. 3, July 1991), 295-303.
  \item Mills, \textit{Ao Nagas}, 215.
  \item Citing this example from Mills, \textit{Ao Nagas}, 223-6.
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semantic ones; they served to distinguish their bearers and to denote their social position in the village.”

Thus the Nagas, before the advent of British colonizers and Christian missionaries, were self-sufficient, independent, colorful people; and yet, one could also imagine the dreadful environment of head-hunting in which they lived.

2.3. Modernization and its Development

Before studying the agents and the impact of modernization, one should know the philosophy behind the modernistic thinking and action. The effects of modernization have penetrated every aspect of human society. They have affected the political system, the economy, the family, forms of entertainment, and all other basic institutions. There is no doubt that modernity ushered in development and progress to many societies, such as longevity of life, comfortable lifestyle, and growth in human intellectuality. However, not all are privileged with the blessings of modernity. In fact it is argued that modernity brought blessings and comfort to certain sections of the world (the First World) at the expense of others (the developing world or the Third World).

The concept of modernity was sowed in Europe during the time of Renaissance i.e., the 14th to 17th century A.D. It was a time of “rebirth,” or “revival,” of the classical Greek and Roman cultures. British philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1625) played an important role in shaping the trajectory of modernity. Bacon believed that it was through science that humanity could rule over nature. Thus, for Bacon, knowledge was power. This understanding of knowledge as power found rigorous support in Bacon's successors.

Along with the critical mind of the Renaissance during the 18th and 19th centuries—which is also popularly called the Enlightenment period—human reason and its ontology was lifted to

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an unprecedented height. Rene Descartes was one of the champions of this period. In him, one sees the father of modern philosophy. His hermeneutic of doubt was the basis of all reason. According to Descartes, through doubting and reasoning, one gets to the authentic truth. His dictum “I think, therefore I am” summarizes his philosophical agendas. The human is the highest being because he can think and reason; whatever cannot be reasoned by the human mind cannot be true. Thus, a place for miracles in the Scripture could not be found. Bacon’s and Descartes’ reasoning gave rise to the notion that every truth has to be scientifically and objectively proven. Auguste Comte later articulated this notion as positivism. Coupled with positivism, Comte provided a full-fledged understanding of evolutionary theory. According to Comte, scientific knowledge evolves through three successive states:

The theological or fictitious, in which small numbers of isolated observations were linked by supernatural ideas; the metaphysical or abstract, in which a larger number of facts were linked to ideas conceived as personified abstractions; and the scientific or positive, in which great numbers of facts were connected by the smallest possible number of general laws, each in turn suggested or confirmed by facts.

In other words, everything from nature to humanity evolves from simple/primitive to sophisticated entities. Very soon these notions of positivism and evolution theories were applied to social studies such as anthropology. At first the Europeans applied these theories by analyzing their own context; but, beginning with the age of exploration, Europe was brought into contact with many different cultures and peoples. Thus the study of anthropology was reduced to the study of “Others” and “Otherness.” The general understanding of the European anthropologists during this period was that the “Others” were humans but in lower stages of biological and

39 Ibid.
40 Paul G. Hiebert, Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), 3.
42 Hieber, Missiological Implications, 14.
cultural progress.\textsuperscript{43} The Europeans were considered rational, scientific, and educated whereas the “Others” were ignorant, superstitious, and unscientific. It is this kind of understanding that ironically legitimated the European colonial venture as not oppressive but a benevolent act to bring progress to the uncivilized and savage people.\textsuperscript{44} Hiebert puts the goal of anthropology during this period succinctly:

The central task of anthropology was to study strange people who have very strange customs. Specifically, it was to study small, simple societies with low levels of technology, no writing, and tribal religions. Anthropologists did this using the categories, logic, and goals of modernity, which confirmed their beliefs that these societies were primitive and magical in their ways of thinking.\textsuperscript{45}

This hermeneutic of modernity must be in the background as we move into the second part of the paper: the agents and impact of modernization amongst the Nagas.

3. Section II: The Agents and Impacts of Modernization

3.1. The Agents of Modernization
3.1.1. The Colonial British Administration

Nagas had contact with the outside world before the advent of British colonization in the form of the Ahom dynasty. The Ahom dynasty ruled over Assam (presently a neighboring state of Nagaland in India) for over 600 years.\textsuperscript{46} Nagas had contact with the Ahom both in terms of combat and economic matters. It is also documented that an Ahom king married a Konyak Naga woman.\textsuperscript{47} However, in 1826 the Ahom dynasty was conquered by the British and, this eventually brought the Nagas into contact with the British colonizer.\textsuperscript{48} The British were not interested in

\textsuperscript{43} For instance the views of Lewis Henry Morgan. See L.L. Langness, \textit{The Study of Culture} (Novato: Chandler & Sharp, 1987), 16-20.
\textsuperscript{44} Hiebert, \textit{Missiological Implications}, 15.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Rai Sahib Golap Chandra Barua, \textit{Ahom-Buranji: From the Earliest Time to the End of Ahom Rule} (Guwahati: Spectrum Publication, 1985).
\textsuperscript{47} Stockhausen, \textit{Creating Naga}, 59.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
interrupting the Naga Hills in the beginning, perhaps because the British perceived the Naga Hills as unproductive areas and financially burdensome. Moreover, the British administration might have wanted to keep the Naga Hills as a buffer between British Indian and China. The British government was only interested in the plain areas of Assam, where they invested in the area for tea plantation. However, two factors initiated the British administration to subdue the Nagas: first, the Nagas begin to raid the tea plantation workers; and second, the British administration wanted to construct a road into the Naga Hills, which would connect them to Manipur (another Northeast state of India) and eventually to Burma. Thus, the Nagas experienced western military violence beginning in 1832. Nagas’ villages were burnt down, leaving many dead or displaced in the jungle. Nagas, as fierce as they were, could not withstand the modern artillery of pounders and mortars. Commenting on the British-Naga conflict, S. Baruah avers: “[This conflict was] one of the most violent chapters in the history of British conquest of the sub-continent.” Nagas, subsequently, were subjugated and colonized by the British for more than a century.

Curiously, the British administration in the Naga Hills decided to follow non-intervention policy. In other words, they did not want to change the culture of the Nagas; rather, they wanted Nagas to have continuity in their culture. At the surface level this approach of the British administration appears to be being sensitive to “other” cultures. However, the purpose for such approach was the underlying principle of the thickly modernistic concept of evolution. In other words, the British administration considered the Nagas’ culture as “primitive” or “savage.”

51 “In general, anthropological thought in the late nineteenth century attempted to subsume the study of human phenomena within positivistic natural science.” Quoting from George Stocking, “Paradigmatic Traditions in the History of Anthropology” in The Ethnographer’s Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1992), 342-61.
which reflected their own nascent stage of civilization. They considered the Naga Hills as a large natural scientific laboratory in which to do their positivistic research. P.T. Phillip remarks, “Many Anthropologists were shedding crocodile tears disrupting the age old tribal way of life and its foundations. Probably they wanted to keep Nagaland as an anthropological museum.”52 It is worth noting at this point that the prominent District commissioners of the Naga Hills, namely Mills and Hutton, were both anthropologists in the mold of British social anthropology in the nineteenth century.53 Mills and Hutton appointed Naga leaders who would help them collect the tax and took initiative in settling disputes among the villagers. Apart from these things, the commissioners were satisfied to leave the Nagas by themselves and preserve the “noble savage.” The commissioners were against the missionaries, who were bringing social change to the Nagas. They charged five rupees to those who wore shorts instead of their traditional loin clothes.54 Mills even laments about the abolition of head-hunting by the missionaries: “Life for the Ao [Nagas], now that head-hunting is abolished, may be less strained, but it is certainly more drab. Much of the spice has gone. No more the thrill of raid and counter raid. He is a poor sort of man who does not at times feel a longing for risk.”55 One wonders whether the thrill of head-hunting was missed by the Nagas or by the anthropologist.

Although the British administration tried to preserve the Naga culture and traditions, it is inevitable that social change will take place when two cultures interact. One major social change that British administration affected, which has a present ramification, was dividing the Nagas

53 Both J.H. Hutton and J.P. Mills served as district commissioners of the Naga Hills. Hutton went on to become a professor of Anthropology at Cambridge and Mills a Reader in the London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies. Hiebert writes that the British social anthropologist prior to Malinowski sought to provide detail, objective and scientific description and explanation of other cultures. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 89.
into tribal entities.\textsuperscript{56} The very concept of tribe itself went through a change of meaning as the Roman administrators used it to divide states into smaller units in order to foster smooth governance.\textsuperscript{57} But later, especially with the advent of modernism, the concept of tribe has the meaning of people without government system and boundary.\textsuperscript{58} Nagas never knew the present classification of tribes until the British administration presented them with such tribal names as Ao, Sema, Lotha, Angami and so on.\textsuperscript{59} Today this classification has injected the concept of backward tribes amongst the Nagas and further engendered tribalism amongst them.

\textbf{3.1.2. American Baptist Missionary}

Juxtaposing with the presence of British colonial administration was the existence of the American Baptist mission, who fervently supplanted Naga indigenous culture and replaced it with the modernistic worldview.\textsuperscript{60} In fact it was the British captain Francis Jenkins who invited the missionaries to work with the Nagas. Captain Jenkins opines that, “The savage head hunters could not be raised to the standard of civilization unless they were redeemed from their primitive way of life by spreading Christianity and education.”\textsuperscript{61} The crucial words in this statement are “civilization” and “Christianity.” In other words, to be civilized meant to be Christian; thus,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Lotha, \textit{Naga Identity}, 48.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Citing it from Thanzauva, “Is ‘Tribal’ a Redeemable Term?” in \textit{In Search of Identity and Tribal Theology: A Tribute to Dr. Renthry Keitzer} (Tribal Study Series no. 9; ed., A Wati Longchar; Jorhat: ETC, 2000), 8-16.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} See L.H. Morgan, \textit{Ancient Society} (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907).
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Eloise Hiebert Meneses in her argument about nation-state and nationalism states, “In truth, the lines of the modern nation-states are hardly the result of primodial developments. Throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia, territorial boundaries are still in existence that were once the compromises of European whose primary rivalry was not with the rest of the world but with one another. Indegenous ethnic groups were variously split and lumped together to form the empires of England, Germany, France, Spain, and Portugal. Political structures and forms of leadership, both within and between ethnic groups, were altered as the European endeavored to administer their territories cheaply and productively.” See Meneses, “Bearing Witness in Rome with Theology from the Whole Church” in \textit{Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity} (eds., Graig Ott and Netland; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 231-249.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Von Stockhausen calls the Baptist missionaries to Naga Hills as prohibitionist Baptists from the United States. See Von Stockhausen, \textit{Creating Naga}, 66.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ao Naga Baptist Church Centenary, 1872-1972 Album} (Impur: ABAM, 1972), 1.
\end{itemize}
Christianity was reduced to Westernization. This is reflected in the action of the missionaries who demanded the Nagas to adopt western dress and abstain from alcohol (local rice beer) in order to profess Christianity. Hiebert in fact calls this era (1800-1950) the era of non-contextualization, an era where colonialism had proved that Western civilization was the highest civilization in the world and it was assumed that “others” should embrace both Christianity and the “modern.” Within this understanding it did not make sense to contextualize the Gospel because all the “other” cultures were evolving towards the highest culture—Western culture.

After a number of years attempting to reach out to the Naga Hills, finally in 1872 Godhula, an Assamese evangelist, and Dr. E. W. Clark, an American Baptist missionary, could penetrate into Molung and slowly started to see a positive response from the villagers. In eight months’ time (November 1872) Clark baptized nine Nagas, and this event is considered the beginning of Christianity amongst the Nagas. It should be noted that Clark’s wife, Mary Mead, also played a pivotal part in shaping the Nagas in becoming a “modern” people.

As the Christian mission exhilarated, the missionaries did away with the morung. With this the indigenous school system was dismantled and replaced by modern English schools. Morung was considered by the missionaries to be a house of the heathen, and to use those houses would mean going against Christian laws. Führer-Haimendorf articulates: “one may agree or disagree with the principle of giving boys a training in community spirit outside the individual

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62 See also Tezenlo Thong, “‘Thy Kingdom Come’: The Impact of Colonization and Proselytization on Religion among the Nagas” JAAS 45(6) 595-609. Hiebert asserts this: roughly from 1800 to 1950, most Protestant missionaries in India, and later in Africa, rejected the beliefs and practices of the people they served as “pagan.” John Pobee writes “…to the present time all the historical churches by and large implemented the doctrine of the tabula rasa, i.e, the missionary doctrine that there is nothing in the non-Christian culture on which the Christian missionary can build and, therefore, every aspect of the tradition non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up.’ Consequently, the gospel was seen by the people as a foreign gospel. To become Christian one had to accept not only Christianity but also Western cultural ways. Quoting from Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization” International Bulletin of Missionary Research 11 (July 1987): 104-12.
64 Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 104.
family, but there can be no question that the morung is one of the main pillars of the Ao’s [Nagas’] social order.”

The feast of merit was also abolished. As discussed about this feast of merit, even though it had a direct link with gaining prestige, honor, and animal sacrifice to the spirits, it also had a communal aspect. This feast of merit provided the Nagas with incentive to work hard in order to feed the whole community. But with this abolition, Nagas began to work to hoard food to later sell it for profit. The very notion of capitalism in the villages was instituted for the first time by the missionaries. This inversion of culture and worldview almost led Naga’s well known craftsmen into extinction. Naga villages were adorned with sculpted poles, and the houses of those who had performed feasts of merit were rewarded with special craftsmen’s work. But with the coming of Christianity, those works were considered pagan propaganda. Today, hardly a handful of Naga craftsmen exist, even the colorful shawls are now merely made for outward fashions without any inward meaning. At best these artifacts remind the present Nagas of the past but they do not have anything in them to preserve culture or tradition. Fürer-Haimendorf again avers:

The Christian object to the feast of merit presumably because the animals consumed in their course are not just slaughtered but sacrificed with appropriate invocations of the spirits. Yet one would think that with a little trouble an institution of an essentially social and economic character could have been remodeled so as to be compatible with Christian tenets. Were such adjustments impossible, Europe would have long lost all its folk festivals and the Christmas tree would long ago have been condemned as a pagan symbol.

As stated above, the problem with the missionaries’ thinking lies in the fact that to embrace Christianity meant to dismantle indigenous culture. This notion was further espouse by the fact that indigenous culture was archaic, primitive, savage, uncivilized and that it is the means and

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65 Fürer-Haimendorf, Naked Nagas, 52.
66 It should be noted that Nagas used the barter system of business with the plain Assamese neighbors.
67 Fürer-Haimendorf, Naked Nagas, 53.
vehicle of heathenism. There is no doubt that there were positive factors that the missionaries espoused. They initiated schools and hospitals and helped eradicate the practice of headhunting. Above all they introduced the Nagas to Christ. However, such wholesale changes of culture, and more so with a domineering and chauvinistic attitude, has impacted the Nagas greatly. In fact, its consequences are even felt strongly more than a century later. To this issue we will now turn.

3.2. The Impact of Modernization amongst the Nagas

The most damaging blow of modernization amongst the Nagas was the instilling of the deep-seated notion in them that their culture was primitive, uncivilized, and immoral.68 It is ironic that both the British colonizers and the missionaries were in conflict about how to deal with the Nagas. The former wanted to preserve the noble savage whereas the latter wanted to replace the Naga culture with that of western civilization. However, this conflict was not a major issue because the underlying principle of both these agents was singular: the concept of modernism—positivistic and evolutionism. Balfour puts this conflict into perspective: “In endeavouring to promote culture-metamorphosis, if our conscientious aim is to raise the savage to a higher level, we should try to achieve our objective by evolution, not by revolution.”69 The British administration wanted to achieve modernization of the Nagas through evolution whereas the missionaries endeavored to modernize through revolution. In both ways, the attitude was that the Nagas were primitive and their culture needed to be scrapped and replaced. However, in hindsight at least, the conflict was won by the missionaries and thus Naga culture was

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68 To be fair, it should be noted that both the colonizer as well as the missionaries were people of their time. Therefore, in a way, they were doing what they best knew—so they thought. It would be a mistake to think that such a domineering paradigm as modernism is passé. In fact it lingers on, albeit, newer paradigms have been born. This is not about accusation of the colonizers or the missionaries but it is about trying to comprehend the reality.

revolutionized.\textsuperscript{70} In other words, the Nagas were left with a great cultural vacuum that needed to be filled, which the missionaries gullibly filled with their own culture. The result of such a seismic change is twofold: first, split level Christians were produced; second, rootless society was manufactured.

3.2.1. Split Level Christians

Hiebert and his daughter Meneses have pointed out accurately that the result of such non-contextual proselytization is that the native culture goes underground.\textsuperscript{71} As such, it provides a healthy platform where syncretism could flourish seamlessly. There is deep irony when the statistic shows that a community comprising of 85-90\% Christians is yet one of the most corrupted societies, just as corrupt as any other non-Christian developing state.\textsuperscript{72} It is unfortunate that the present Naga state fits the bill well. It is heartening to see churches in every nook and cranny of Nagaland, and it is heart-warming to witness the churches oozing with congregation during the Sunday worship. These are good signs but a critical evaluation that leads to radical action is the need of the hour when the Church worship is not translated into day-to-day political, social and economic activities. There is a feeling that there might be an undercurrent wave within the Nagas to consider Sunday worship yet another ceremony to appease the spirits.

Another phenomenon that depicts the split level Christianity among the Nagas is resorting to witchcraft. This can be seen in the practice of many Nagas visiting Hindu Brahmans or even the local medicine man. Sometimes even the so called Christian prophets act rather like shamans

\textsuperscript{70} This is not the place to speculate what the Nagas would have become had the British colonizers’ approach succeeded. In hindsight, they were more interested in their agenda of preserving the noble savage than preserving Naga culture.
\textsuperscript{71} Hiebert and Meneses, Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1995), 167.
\textsuperscript{72} I am stating this not with arrogance or just for the sake of being critical, but with an attitude of being a responsible person of Naga society desiring to bring right social change to the state.
(for instance, the manner in which they chase away evil spirits). These are some examples that demonstrate non-contextual proselytization has produced to a large extent nominal Christians amongst the Nagas. Sanyu articulates, “[I]n many aspects one can argue that Christianity has not taken root in the social life of the Nagas, and it seems that most Nagas are Christians at a superficial level.” The present Naga Churches have to come to grips with this reality and ask the question about why this is happening. Awareness will be the beginning of revitalizing Naga Christianity within their culture and most importantly as individuals. This split level attitude of Christians is related to the new worldview that the agents of modernization have “planted” amongst the Nagas.

3.2.2. The Rootless Society

The chauvinistic attitude and hegemonic vision of the agents of modernization has created a schizophrenic Naga society. This is predominantly highlighted in the current Naga worldview reflected through their interaction with one another. The positivistic and evolutionistic concepts through which the agents of modernization endeavored have been successfully transmitted to the Nagas’ mind. The understanding that Nagas’ culture was primitive and backward has left the Nagas constantly in pursuit of Western culture. Thus the Nagas themselves became evolutionist in their thinking. Von Stockhausen avers, “almost every conversation [among the young Nagas] about their grandfather’s culture contains at some point the sad and unconsidered words ‘we are very backward,’ which brings them full circle back to the ever-present mindset of European evolutionism.” The interesting reality is that the Western/modernistic culture which thrives on scientific and sophisticated infrastructures was somehow neglected by the modernizing agents.

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74 Von Stockhausen, “Creating Naga,” 74.
For instance, Horam laments, “The education [which the missionaries carried out] was meant to facilitate the reading of the bible, rather than in turning out doctors, engineers, craftsmen and mechanics. This imbalance remains today and now more Nagas are receiving their degrees as arts graduates rather than in technical subject.”\textsuperscript{75} Of course, it is one thing to receive modern education and quite another to receive quality and effective education. Such discrepancies have created many Nagas who see themselves as half-cooked rice—people who are neither here nor there. Now the real problem is that half-cooked rice cannot be turned into uncooked rice. It is not like lukewarm water, which can be made cold or hot. The Nagas are like half-cooked rice because it is simply impossible to go back to where they were before the agents of modernization swept through them. Hiebert and Meneses assert, “Modernity has come and people cannot go back to their traditional ways which were sounder because of an overall unity achieved by a respect for power far greater than that of the modern police force with its jails and firing squad.”\textsuperscript{76}

Within this above mentioned dilemma, or identity crisis, Nagas can respond in two tangible ways. First, they can attempt to revive the past culture and traditions. Lately, there have been many cultural shows, most prominently state sponsored shows such as the Road Show and the Hornbill Festival.\textsuperscript{77} The idea is to promote Naga culture and tourism. Second, Nagas can completely shed their old traditions and strive to achieve the Western status. However, both responses have problems. The former might romanticize the past without really making sense and the latter might be superficial.\textsuperscript{78} In both ways, the ground remains unfertile to let the root grow deep into the earth. Let me return to my illustration of half-cooked rice. There are two

\textsuperscript{76} Hiebert and Meneses, \textit{Incarnational Ministry}, 181.
\textsuperscript{77} See \url{www.Nagalandpost.com} April 7, 2010; and December 5, 2011.
\textsuperscript{78} Hiebert and Meneses, \textit{Incarnational Ministry}, 181.
more possibilities to look at in this illustration: first, whether cooked or uncooked or half-cooked, rice will remain rice; second, half-cooked rice has the potential to be fully cooked, and there is ample room for whoever handles that. He can use fire wood, a gas stove, an electric stove, or some other means to cook the half-cooked rice. In other words, to be fully cooked does not necessarily mean to be fully Western. Having articulated this, it is imperative to act with urgency to break the spiral of confusion. It is here that the Naga Churches can actively involve in nurturing Naga people’s identity and culture. To that end we will move our discussion.

4. Section III: Theological Response

4.1. Understanding Culture

I begin this section with the heading “Understanding Culture” because I reckon that Naga Churches have a great role to play in shaping a Naga culture that is both Naga and biblical in outlook. Hiebert defines culture as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”79 In light of this, he divides culture into three dimensions: namely cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions. All these three dimensions are important in defining culture. However, one dimension stands out, and that is the cognitive dimension. This aspect of culture concentrates on the knowledge shared by the members of a community. In other words, the community’s feelings and actions are directly related to their cognitive level of culture. Without shared and cohesive knowledge, communication and community life is not possible. As discussed in the “Impact of Modernization amongst the Nagas,” unfortunately Nagas are suffering from having a cohesive shared knowledge—in the form of split level Christianity and identity dilemma—because of the

79 Hiebert, Anthropological Insights, 30.
rough experience of modernization. Naga churches should muster themselves to look into this issue prayerfully and seriously.

Culture is not rigid or a dogma but it is constructed and contested.\textsuperscript{80} In other words, culture constantly changes.\textsuperscript{81} Culture interacts constantly with nature, fellow humans, and the world beyond, or the supernatural. In this interaction, culture is ever evolving. Reflecting on this interaction of culture, Aküm Longchari says, “Through reflection and action, a people—any people—would constantly be in the process of negotiating the evolving culture and challenges that emerge from the three elements [nature, fellow humans, supernatural].”\textsuperscript{82} In light of this, the Nagas have been crippled by forced modernization and more so by the nature of the process of modernization employed by the British colonizers and missionaries. Put differently, Nagas have been crippled to reflect, construct, and contest with nature, fellow humans, and the supernatural. The reason is that the modernization process has made the Nagas completely dependent on external powers. Thus their abilities are surmounted within the spiral of identity crisis.\textsuperscript{83} It is here that the Naga churches should guide and direct the society out of the vicious spiral of severe cultural schizophrenia. Naga churches should be able to point out that Naga culture cannot be found in the past but neither can it be found in copying other’s way of life. Rather Nagas should

\textsuperscript{80} Hiebert, \textit{The Gospel in Human Contexts}, 150.

\textsuperscript{81} Here is my personal understanding from experience about culture as in constant flux: “Culture is so fluid in nature. I feel like I am shaping my culture everyday as I interact with cross cultural friends. It is interesting how I sift data each day as I interact with friends. This information somehow has ramifications in the way I perceive the “world” and give meanings to it. Yet, the fact that I “sift” information implies that I have within me an “acquired” framework in place. This acquired framework is my culture. Thus in my sifting of information culture is in constant dialectical process—the process of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. This process is endless and maybe circular. Another factor is that the information I receive after sifting through my framework affects my perspective, and this suggests that I have the ability to construct my own culture and identity (perhaps, very unique from the culture which I acquired). However, the fact that “humans are social animal” means my culture will always be associated with certain group of people or society. Thus in my interaction with my local people I become a potential agent to reshape my Naga culture.” Quoting from Virtual Campus discussion on “Methods on Cultural Anthropology,” posted on September 21\textsuperscript{a}, 2011.


\textsuperscript{83} Hiebert says “We see this [paralysis] when societies are overrun by other, more powerful ones or collapse internally.” See Hiebert \textit{The Gospel in Human Contexts}, 151.
look to their ancestors and learn from them the way they developed the Naga traditions. It is only when Nagas are able to develop and transform their ancestors’ traditions for present reality that a true Naga culture will emerge. To transform ancestors’ traditions means to “act with” what the ancestors have handed down. Naga churches should take the initiative in order to perform this profound task.

4.2. Yahwistic Tradition: A Paradigm for Developing Naga Culture

Biblical Israelites are a resilient people. These people went through different types of crisis generation after generation, and yes, they were ruffled by those crisis, even shattered at times but they recovered because of their strong identity and tradition—or strong cultural values. Israelite tradition was not a dogma but it evolved through time especially as it confronted those crises. Gerhard von Rad in his Old Testament (OT) theology has argued that OT in its final form is an outcome of the telling and re-telling/re-interpretation of the Israelites’ creed reflected in Deut 6:20-24; 26:5-6; Josh 24:1-3. I will demonstrate here how the Israelites coped with the situation and how their tradition underwent transformation as it interacted with both internal and external challenges.

Israel’s tradition is Yahwistic tradition. The crux of the Yahwistic tradition is the Exodus event. It is through this experience that God called Israel out from slavery to become a nation. Paul Hanson contends, “The shape of the development of Israel’s earliest oral and literary traditions was determined through and through by the confession of the God Yahweh who

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delivered Hebrews from Egyptian bondage." This belief, according to Hanson, gave rise to a triad characteristic to Israel’s community—righteousness, compassion, and worship. This notion formed the core of the Yahwistic tradition.

Israel’s Yahwistic tradition is dynamic and not static. It was through Israel’s prophets that this was not only preserved but also re-interpreted to make it relevant in the society in which they lived. Von Rad avers, “[the prophets] were in greater or lesser degree conditioned by old traditions which they re-interpreted and applied to their own times.” This tradition in its nascent stage received challenges during the time of Judges, especially from the Canaanite culture and religion. However, one of the greatest challenges that Yahwistic tradition faced was from within—the introduction of Israel’s monarchy. The monarchial system in itself had the needed ingredient to create tension within Yahwistic tradition (1 Sam 8). The fact being that, in the Yahwistic tradition, YHWH was considered the principal ruler of the community. It is during this time that the prophets rose as defenders of their old tradition, providing a fresh interpretation to it:

They would have to look to less tangible, more essential qualities, such as righteousness, compassion, and faith, taking Yahweh’s covenant fidelity as a starting point. And they would have to be prepared to struggle to preserve these qualities in the face of political structures and social practices that often contradicted the principles of Yahwism.

According to Hanson, Israel’s monarchy initially was to be “limited monarchy.” In other words, YHWH was still to play a major role in the lives of Israel’s day-to-day activities both nationally and internationally. The first king of Israel, Saul, failed to cope with the tension of

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86 Paul D. Hanson, The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 12. However, this does not mean that the patriarchal narratives are not important but that the Exodus event is the heart of Yahwistic tradition.
87 Hanson, The People of God, 70.
89 Hanson, The People Called, 96.
90 Ibid., 100.
living between a “limited monarchy” and a “monarchy in the model of other nations” (1 Sam 8:5). However, in David, YHWH saw a king attempting to grapple with this tension. Thus, YHWH, through his prophet Nathan, entered into a covenant with David and his royal house (2 Sam 7). Of course, the reason for this covenant was that king David found favor in YHWH’s eyes. But the crucial factor is that through this Davidic covenant Yahwistic tradition added another layer. Now David and his descendants became important figures within Yahwistic tradition. This was needed in order to sustain the continuity of the Yahwistic tradition.

However, because Solomon failed to live within the context of “limited monarchy,” the kingdom was divided into Northern and Southern Kingdoms (1 Kings 13). Eventually both these Kingdoms went into exile (721 B.C and 587 B.C respectively) because they each failed to keep the covenant of Yahwistic tradition. The exilic period was a time in which people were questioning the very roots of Yahwism—the righteousness, compassion, and power of their God. It was imperative that people’s questions were answered; otherwise the Yahwistic notion of community would be destroyed. It was the prophet Jeremiah who took the initiative to look at the dire situation from the perspective of the traditions of early Yahwism and concluded that “Yahweh would have to act anew to implant the tôrâ within the hearts of the people if there was to be future for his people” (Jer 31:31-34).\(^9\) Thus an eschatological dimension was added to the Yahwistic tradition. In that way the tradition not only evolved but most importantly gave meaning to the bleak situation of the people. Again, during the post exilic period, Ezra and Nehemiah zealously protected the Yahwistic tradition and community by rigorously emphasizing one of the triad natures of Yahwistic tradition, namely the righteousness of YHWH. As Israel continue to live under different colonial rulers, it was necessary to maintain their identity and tradition. Both Ezra and Nehemiah realized that it is in the emphasis of the righteousness of

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\(^9\) Hanson, *The People of God*, 216.
YHWH that Israel could weather the storm. Thus in all these we see how the prophets and the reformers interpreted, re-interpreted, emphasized the Yahwistic tradition.

The point for the above discussion is to look at the development of Yahwistic tradition and reappraise it as a paradigm for the Naga churches to act critically upon their culture and tradition. Two factors must be emphasized at this point. First, Yahwistic tradition was a dynamic tradition. Its power was in the process of interpretation and re-interpretation to make tradition relevant and effective to the community at different times and in difficult situations. Second, it was the prophets and reformers of Israel who understood “the signs of the times” (Matt 16:1-3), and along with the revelation of God they acted upon their tradition and provided the needed interpretation of their ancestors’ traditions to sustain the community.

Naga churches have a noble task ahead. They should draw courage, motivation, and inspiration from the people of God and the word of God. Naga churches have to go beyond conducting worships that act as pain relievers. It is time for the churches to realize that the problem with the Nagas is deeper than what a temporary pain relief medicine could do. The churches should touch the real problem of the people, and that will make the word of God as sweet as the honey comb (Pro 6:24) as it has never been before. It is only when the Naga churches break the powerful spell that the modernizing agents have cast on them and restore the power and ability to interact and transform their ancestors’ culture and tradition that Nagas will live as a people full of life and vision. To that end may the powerful God who acts in history provide the Nagas and the Naga churches the needed power and vision to overcome their bleak situation.
5. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the impact of modernization amongst the Nagas has crippled their ability to act and transform their culture and worldview. The task of the Naga churches is to revive the power to transform their culture and provide lasting meaning that is both biblical and Naga in nature. I achieved this conclusion by analyzing the agents and impacts of modernization amongst the Nagas. I then proposed that Israel’s Yahwistic tradition and its development can be a paradigm for the Naga Churches to bring transformation and meaning into their culture.
Appendix: Nagaland Map
Bibliography


