

A brief historical account: Christianity among the Ao Nagas of North-East India

Intimangyang

Ph.D Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract

Coming of Christianity to the Ao Nagas was in a way facilitated by the prevailing political, economic and socio-cultural situation of that time, bringing the hill people in the path of the proliferative mission of The American Baptist Mission. The political and economic expansion policy of the British government paved the way up to the door step of the frontier tribes offering the mission irresistible opportunity to establish mission field. On the other hand, the persistent effort of the missionaries fueled by their strong conviction in their faith and support from some Christian British officials caused them to gain ground leading to proselytization of the tribes.

Keywords: Ao Nagas, molungkimong, christianity, Nagaland, Northeast

Introduction: Nagas

Naga is a generic term referring to a group of people inhabiting the Naga Hills in the North-eastern region of India and North-western Burma. These groups, numbering over thirty, exhibits significantly different cultural traits and language having their own characteristics but also shares some strikingly similar traits. Today the term Naga is well established, extending its usage to describe an ethnic identity referring to the land and people themselves. The term Naga has a vague origin but it certainly is not of native origin as we find no reference to the term in Naga dialects, but it is a term given by the people inhabiting the valley surrounding the hills as a term of reference, which later become popularized and become established in the way it is used today.

The subject of Naga migration and how they came to the present area has been a matter of speculation among many scholars. Though definite route of their migration cannot be established it is largely accepted today that the “Nagas have migrated from South East Asia through the present North West Myanmar following different direction. It is to be noted that the migration of the Naga tribes did not take place in one wave only” (Talitemjen Jamir and Lanunungsang 2005) ^[10]. The admixture of the Nagas are believed to constitute different racial and ethnic groups, about which W.C Smith writes “we have concluded that these different peoples are not typical Mongols, but have a Caucasian admixture. ...it is then from this contact of the two races that we have the Nagas and other related groups”. Verrier Elwin was of the view that Nagas are Indo-Mongoloid folk, inhabiting the North-eastern region of Indian and North-western region of Burma speaking over a dozen languages. The Nagas at any rate seems to inhabit the present area for a very long time regarding which W. C Smith writes “according to the annals of the Ahoms, when the Ahoms invaded Assam in A.D. 1215, the different Naga tribes were settled in their present habitat, and from all that we can gather they were the same Nagas which the British found when they took possession of Assam several centuries later”.

Their isolated existence in the hills for a long period of time can be understood by the absence of cultural trait of the major neighboring cultures like Hinduism and Buddhism. It can be understood that since 261 B.C when Buddhism began to spread over Lower Burma, Indo-China and Japan in the one direction, and over Nepal, Tibet and Sikkim in the other, it appears that the Nagas at this time were already out of the region of South-East Asia and Tibet; and were established in the Naga Hills; for, with an exception of one tribe at any rate, the Maring of the Kabaw valley, the Naga tribes does not exhibit Buddhist elements (Roland Shimmy, 1988) ^[17].

The term ‘Naga’ came into being as a term of reference to the people inhabiting the Naga Hills, a convenient term which was later projected by the British for administrative purpose. Later on, by means of gaining education and political consciousness, self-appropriation of a separate political and cultural identity by the Nagas begun during the late 1920s and gaining momentum through the decades, resulting in arm conflict. Nagaland became the 16th state of the Indian union on 1st December 1963. State of Nagaland is located in the north-eastern region of India. Kohima is the capital of Nagaland and Dimapur is the largest city of the state. Nagaland state shares border with Arunachal Pradesh in the North, Assam in the west, Manipur in the south and Myanmar in the east. The state has an area of 16,579 square kilometers with a population of 1,980,602 as per the 2011 Census of India. The major Naga tribes in Nagaland are; Ao, Angami, Sumi, Lotha, Chakesang, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Sangtam, Khiamniungan, Rengma, Pochury, Yimchunger and Zeliang. Several other Naga tribes are found in the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Myanmar.

Ao people belong to Mongoloid ethnicity of Tibeto-Burmese linguistic group constituting one of the major Naga tribe in Nagaland. W.C Smith on writing about the Ao Nagas states, “...the tribe affords a pretty clear case of the comparatively recent fusion of two racial groups, but that it is most unlikely that either of these was even approximately pure when the

fusion took place". Studies has shown the affinities, in terms of similar cultural traits and physical appearance, of Ao Nagas with people inhabiting the areas surrounding the Naga Hills such as; Miris, Abors, Mishmis and Singphos of the sub-Himalayan region, Garo, Kachins, Manipuries and Lushais etc of the Indo-Burmese region, Lolos, Miasos and others of the Yunnan province. Their affinity goes as far as Indonesia, New Guinea and Fiji extending further to New Zealand and even to South America (W.C Smith 1925) ^[18]. Mokokchung district is the home of the Ao Nagas and Mokokchung town is the districts headquarter. It is one of the most important urban centers in Nagaland after Dimapur and Kohima. It is also economically and politically the most important center in northern part of Nagaland. The area under Mokokchung came under British administration in 1876 and was made a subdivision in 1889 and remained so till 1956.

Beginning of Christian mission in North-East India

The end of the Anglo-Burmese war and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Yandavo on February 24, 1826 paved the way for the arrival of Christian mission into the North-Eastern region of India. The end of Anglo-Burmese war also marked the end of 600 year rule of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. The Christian mission to North-Eastern part of India was an extension of the Burmese mission whose primary aim was to further the mission towards Northern Burma and Western China. The beginning of Christian mission in North-East India was facilitated by some Christian British administrator of Assam for the purpose of pacifying the tribes residing in the surrounding hills who would often make raids on the plains of Assam, and also because of their religious conviction to spread the gospel and convert people to Christianity. Another factor for furthering the Christian mission was the fear of tribal converting to Hinduism and other religion. Such concern was expressed by David Scott, an administrator of Assam between 1826 and 1861, in his letter to the authority in Calcutta seeking permission for missionaries to work among the Garos. He writes:

I am satisfied that nothing permanently good can be obtained by other means, and that if we do not interfere on behalf of the poor Garos, they will soon become Hindus or Half-Hindus. (In N. Toshi Ao, 1995) ^[5]

Invitation was also extended to the Serampore Mission in 1829 and they subsequently established a school in Guwahati. The primary goal of this mission was to convert the Garos to Christianity. However, the school was closed due to lack of monetary assistance and manpower. This mission came to an end with the killing of David Scott in the Anglo-Khasi war. Another British administrator with strong evangelical conviction who was instrumental in setting up a mission station in Sadiya, in upper Assam, was Major Francis Jenkins, who becomes the Chief Commissioner of Assam province in 1834. His effort to get missionaries from the Serampore mission failed and therefore he wrote to the American Baptist Mission in Burma. His invitation conceited with the resolution of the Richmond Convention of American Baptists to tap in to unoccupied territory. Seizing the opportunity of the mission at Sadiya to convert the frontier tribes into Christianity, the

Baptist Mission accepted the invitation of Major Jenkins.

The primary objective of the mission in Sadiya was to reach northern Burma and southern China and therefore missionary Nathan Brown and O.T. Cutter, along with their families who were serving in the Burma mission were brought to Sadiya on 23rd March 1836 with that objective. The mission station at Sadiya was under the assistance and protection of British administrator of Assam province. The missionaries here engaged in learning the local language and publication of reading materials in local language. A mission school was also opened at Sadiya by the Browns and Cutters on June 1836. Upon Brown's request to the board they were later joined by Jacob Thomas and Mile Bronson along with their families on 1837. Jacob Thomas was unfortunately killed in an accident before they reached Sadiya and only his wife Mrs. Thomas joined the mission on 17th July 1837.

The British power was limited to the Assam valley at that time and the surrounding tribes were not under their subjugation. The tribes would make raids on the plains often causing loss of lives and bringing economic lose as the laborers would refuse to work in the tea garden since that is where raids often took place. Considerable amount of resistance was shown by the tribes against the occupying foreign power causing bloody confrontation between the two. In the morning of 28th January 1839, the Sadiya station was attacked by the Khamtis. They made away with the stockade and magazine and set the cantonment on fire. According to Nathan Brown not less than hundred men were killed including a colonel. The British soldiers successfully retaliated and recovered the stockade and magazine from the Khamtis. In the retaliation some thirty Khamtis, including some chiefs, were said to have killed by the British soldiers. The missionaries were not attacked since they were residing some distance away from the station and maybe because of their relationship with the Khamtis through their mission work. Afterward the Khamtis, Singphos and Mishmis were said to have combined their forces against the British soldiers leading to a bloody confrontation between the two sides causing heavy losses on both side. The British army also started a military operation against the tribes, while the civilians got trapped between the cross fires. Such confrontation lead to the dispersal of the people and it became impossible for the mission work to resume. Regarding this Downs comments "quite simply there was no one left to teach, no one left to whom they could preach" (In N. Toshi Ao, 1995) ^[5]. That was the end of the Sadiya mission.

While still at Sadiya mission some efforts were going on to start missionary work among the Singphos and the Namsang Nagas at Jaipur station not very far from Sadiya. For this purpose Mile Bronson and his family, who joined the Sadiya mission on 1837, was transferred to Jaipur station on May 1838. The Browns and the Cutters also joined the Jaipur station on 1839. The purpose of missionaries moving to Jaipur was to work among the Namsang Nagas, with whom Bronson had come into good relationship. While studying their language and carrying out literature work Bronson also wrote to the Home Board about the prospect of starting a mission among the Namsang Nagas and also of the great scope for tea garden in the region. Convinced by Bronson's word, the Home Board commissioned Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Baker on July 22, 1839 in the name of Namsang Naga Mission. Bronsons

moved in with the Namsang Nagas on March 1840, and since they were engaged with the Nagas, the Bakers established a mission center in Sibsagar to work among the Assamese people. A mission school was opened in the Naga hill in 1840, where Miss Rhoda Bronson, Mr. Bronson's sister, also joined them at the mission. The school primarily engaged in imparting Christian education along with personal hygiene and etiquette. However, the Namsang mission could not last long because of the ravaging deadly disease that would strike the missionaries, and with no medical assistance the situation got worse and it became impossible to continue their stay in the hills. The Bronsons withdrew from the Namsang mission towards the end of 1840. Soon after their withdrawal from Namsang Miss. Rhoda Bronson succumbed to fever on 8th December 1840, at Jaipur. With her dead their effort to reach out to other Nagas and to China came to an end. The Namsang School was closed the following year and there was no report of conversion (N. Toshi, 1995)^[5].

Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Bakers who were originally commissioned to the Namsang Naga mission were transferred to Sibsagar, then capital city of the Ahom Kingdom, where a station was established on 14th April, 1841. The Bakers were joined by the Browns at the Sibsagar station. Sibsagar became an important mission center for the entire Assam field. However, the missionary work among the Assamese did not go as expected and they were less successful in bringing the local people under the fold of Christianity. The various reasons given by different authors for the stagnation of the mission are the effect of Mutiny of 1857 which created panic and put the political situation in confusion, compelling several missionaries to move out of Assam. Another reason is the depression back at home in America caused by the civil war hugely affected the missionary budget, forcing the Board to cut missionary activities such as school, printing press, orphanage and missionary recruitment. Missionary work was also affected by the change of policy of the East India Company towards religion post-mutiny, which encouraged the preservation of the tribal society and their religion, while on the other hand many of the British administrative officials who encouraged and supported the establishment of mission centers was transferred, retired or had died. It was during such time that the Clarks were assigned to the Assam mission.

Mission to the Ao Nagas

Edward Winter Clark and his wife Mary Mead Clark reached Sibsagar on 30th March, 1869. Clark was assigned with the responsibility to look after the press and the welfare of the Churches. But seeing the poor response of the Assamese people and very little success in terms of conversion Clark began to look elsewhere for a new mission field. His attention was drawn towards the hills surrounding the valley, the scantily clothed Ao Nagas who would emerge from the thick forest for trading and would disappear into it once their business is over. The first personal encounter of the Clarks with the Aos was said to be when a group of people from Molungkimong village landed at their bungalow with a hill goat and pestered Mrs. Clark to buy it. The head-hunters were said to be fascinated by the typesetting, printing and binding of books and it "...was for them the wonder of wonders. Some of the great men, dressed in their military customs, came one

day to our schoolhouse door and manifesting much interest in what we were doing, were asked, "Wouldn't you like us to come up to your village and teach your children as you see these being taught?" A chief replied "yes, and we will send our children to learn." "But we hear that you take heads up there." "Oh, yes, we do," he replied, and seizing a boy by the head gave us in a quite harmless way an object-lesson of how they did it" (M.M. Clark, 1907)^[9]. Clarks too become fascinated by this people and expressed desire to work among the hill people. Clark in a letter to the Board wrote:

As I look beyond the mountains over the hills against the southern sky, my soul is not at rest. There comes a strange and secret whisper in my spirit... the voice of by departed Lord... "Go! Teach all nations..." and I said, "I will go..." (In N. Toshi, 1995)^[5]

It was a time when famine and epidemic disease like small-pox, cholera and malaria would wreak havoc among the hill occupants claiming numerous lives, forcing the people to flee to the jungles and plains of Assam and not returning until the epidemic subsides. During the late 1860s small-pox epidemic struck Molungkimong village forcing the people to flee from the village. Molungkimong village is located at latitude of 26°38'7"N and longitude of 94°34'42"E and has an altitude of about 940 meter above sea level on the Changkikong range under Mokochung district. It shares boundary with Assam towards the north and is bounded by Tzurang river on the north and Milak river on the south. Some of the villagers fled to the jungle while many of them were said to have travelled to Sibsagar to escape the disease and remained there for some time. After the epidemic had subsided all the villagers had begun to return to the village, however, one Koramensang, son of Supongmeren did not return to the village. Therefore in search of his son, Supongmeren went to Sibsagar and whilst at Sibsagar he came in contact with an Assamese called Godhula. Godhula was an Assamese evangelist who had converted to Christianity and was baptized in Sibsagar Church in 1860. His work with the Hindus of Majuli Island did not bear any fruit and later he was employed as an evangelist and a teacher at the Sibsagar mission School.

Godhula took interest in Supongmeren while Supongmeren, though with some persuasion initially, was said to be fascinated by the words of Godhula when he was told about the new religion of Jesus, saying that if he accepts the new religion there would be no more sickness, no more hunger, no more head-hunting and that he will have an everlasting life. Supongmeren was drawn by the Christian message of assurance and promise for a better life and he was said to have stayed with the Godhulas from December 1870 to October 1871. Through Godhula he came in contact with Clark who was looking for an opportunity to begin his mission with the Aos. During his stay at Sibsagar Supongmeren thought Godhula and Clark the Ao language, custom, tradition, folklore, and religion. Therefore the ground work preparation for the Aos had started by late 1870 and certain literature work was carried out during this period. Supongmeren was baptized by Clark at Sibsagar during the early 1871 and became a member of the American Baptist Church, which was later transferred to Molungkimong village. Godhula went up to

Molungkimong village accompanied by Supongmeren in October 1871. There was commotion on the arrival of an outsider in the village where some villagers demanded him to be sent out of the village immediately. It was a time of head-hunting and it was not usual to entertain outsiders abruptly in the village, especially from the plains. The villagers suspect Godhula to be a company man, a spy of the white man, but Supongmeren was somehow able to convince the villagers and Godhula was not expelled immediately from the village, but kept confined in a hut and no one was allowed to interact with him. Godhula's prayer and singing in the hut was said to have caught the attention of the villagers who would flock around the hut to listen to him. While Godhula was inside the hut for three days Supongmeren went about teaching the new religion to the people. After keeping him in confinement for three days sensing him to be a peaceful man, Godhula was released and given the freedom to speak and tell about his religion to the villagers. An escort of forty men was provided to Godhula on his return to the mission bungalow in Sibsagar.

Godhula and his wife Lucy went up to Molungkimong village in April 1872 to stay with them, and a bamboo chapel was constructed in the village for religious service. By this time Godhula was said to have acquired a fair amount of knowledge of the Ao socio-cultural organization and their language. From the chapel the mission work was started at Molungkimong village where the village administration did not restrict anyone from listening to him, and therefore a good number would gather in the chapel to listen to him. About the missiological principles of Godhula Purtooshi Ao writes "His main message was about the true, living and loving God, the creator and the master of creation, who was able to control all disasters and plagues, and one who could save them from their enemies" (In N. Toshi, 1995) ^[5]. About this Mrs. Clark also writes "In the failure of their own gods to give them help, they were all the more ready to listen concerning Him, who, Godhula told them, was the Bread of Life" (M.M. Clark, 1907) ^[9]. Given the circumstances the hill people were living in, it is only understandable that they would be mesmerized by such promises. To them it would have come like a life changing hope and assurance. The coming of new religion also created great confusion and conflict between the believer and the non-believer. Some of the issues that arose were about taking part in traditional practices of sacrifice to deity and head-hunting expeditions where all the villagers were expected to participate. The conflict in the village was also fueled by threats from other big Ao villages who threatened to attack the village if they do not expel the new religion. In spite of all these threats nine young men decided to take baptism and was baptized by Clark on 11th November 1872 in Dikhu river. Their names are:

1. Imnapokim
2. Bendangniken
3. Edijungba
4. Imnikenba
5. Metongniken
6. Trokmangyang
7. Mangyang
8. Adiba
9. Ongshiba

The threat to attack the village from bigger Ao villages continues as they continue to harbor the outsider and the new religion. In response Godhula was said to have sent out messages to the big villages that if anyone attack Molungkimong village they would be avenged by the British Soldiers and they would be driven out from their village. This communication acted as deterrence to the other villages.

On the first visit of Godhula along with the nine convert to Sibsagar a date was fixed for the coming of Clark to Molungkimong. Mrs. Clark writes "At the appointed time sixty warriors appeared to escort him" (M.M. Clark, 1907) ^[9]. Clark, escorted by the sixty warriors set out from Sibsagar on 16th December and stayed the first night at the Amguri tea estate under the hospitality of Colonel Buckingham, while they stayed the second night in the valley of *Tzurang* river. The party upon reaching a hillock called *Angotsukong*, a few kilometers away from the village, sent a smoke signal to indicate their arrival. They reached the village gate at around noon time on 18th December 1872. After the arrival of the Clark, preparations were made to dug a pool for baptism but since there was no big enough pool the village administration allowed the *Chungli Tzubo* (well or pond), which was a drinking water source near the village, to be used for baptism. To make it wide and deep enough for the immersion of the converts Clark hired Noksenmangyang Ozukum and Nungshikumba Amang for 25 paise to dig the pond to his requirement. On 22nd December 1872 fifteen converts were baptized in the *Chungli Tzubo* and Lord's Supper was administered to them by Clark in the chapel marking the establishment of the first Christian Church at Molungkimong village in Nagaland. The names of the fifteen converts are:

1. Imnanuken
2. Suponglemba
3. Kilepsangba
4. Yongkongkumzuk
5. Kimajing
6. Arenjungba
7. Pangnem
8. Imnameri
9. Yongyaba
10. Kikaba
11. Mopoinba
12. Tekayongdang
13. Imlinukshi
14. Imlichiba
15. Kilemsungba

Clark returned to Sibsagar after spending twelve days in the village. Only on 2nd march 1876 Clark along with a Bengali help went up to Molungkimong village for permanent settlement. The reason for the delay was the unwillingness of the Home Board to re-open the Naga mission after the failure of the Namsang Mission, and moreover the Naga hill area was an un-administered area and therefore the British administration in Sibsagar could not officially sanction an American missionary to enter the hill area for his mission work.

Mission to the Aos saw gradual and rapid growth and by the time he retires from the hills on 1911, out of the fifty three Ao villages, thirty two had local churches. As compared to other

missions the response and enthusiasm of the Aos was huge favoring a rapid propagation of the new religion. Another reason for success was the self-sustenance of the church since the community took the responsibility of the church beginning with building the chapel and support for the pastors unlike the earlier mission where the upkeep of the church and mission school was the total responsibility of the missionaries. There is no record of closure of churches or any other mission in the Ao region owing to lack of fund or support.

The coming of Christianity caused great confusion among the people which began to threaten the age old practice. Offering sacrifice to deities, head-hunting and other activities were discouraged while the converts become opposed to the customary norms of the village creating conflict and disunity among the people. The direct assault on their social organization and customs and tradition were perceived by many and efforts were made to expel Clark and his religion from the village. Though Christianity has entered the village, during the period of 1873-1875 Molungkimong village was at war with an Ao village called Khar and some other trans-Dikhu tribe (tribes beyond the Dikhu river). Much against the wish of the missionary some Christians also took part in the warfare leading to their disqualification from church membership. In the meantime Clark was contemplating a bigger plan among the Aos. He was working towards recruiting new converts and expanding his mission, and for this purpose the membership of the first nine convert was transferred from Sibsagar Church to Molungkimong on 19th August, 1876. Clark was planning to start a mission center at Molungkimong village from where he could better oversee the work of expansion to other Ao villages. He also planned to build a Church and a mission school at Molungkimong village. Meanwhile around this time there was a political tussle going on in the village between the outgoing village administrator and the incoming administrators. The outgoing members annulled the handover of the power to the new members due to some misunderstanding between them. The incoming group was not allowed to come to power and therefore there arose a deep animosity between the two groups and it fueled the already existing conflict and disunity. It was during this time that Clark proposed to establish the mission center, build a church and a school in the village for which he demanded three sites. The sites demanded by Clark were *Ariju Kimong* (Male Dormitory site), *Mongsen lenden* (A public site), and *Mangko trong* (A sacred place where human skulls are displayed). All the three sites are important and sacred sites and demand of such site proved preposterous and unacceptable to most of the villagers. His demand proved too much for the villagers creating uproar and sharper split among the villager. Unable to secure the site Clark supposedly contemplated leaving the village but was persuaded by the few Christians with an assurance to provide him a better place for the mission. The incoming group who was not allowed to come to power is believed to have influenced Clark with the prospect of securing a better site by establishing a new village. The dispute runs deeper than just conflict between Christians and non-Christians, but it is seeded primarily on the political tussle between the two groups comprising of Christians and non-Christians on both sides. Therefore on 24th October, Clark along with six Christian families and nine non-Christian

families set out to form the new village called Molungyimsen, while Godhula remained at Molungkimong with the remaining Christians. It is located not more than five kilometers away from Molungkimong village and it was a site where two attempts have been made earlier for establishing a new village but abandoned due to interference from wild animals. Molungyimsen village served as the mission center from where Clark made efforts to reach out to other Ao villages. A school was established here by Mrs. Clark in 1878. The need to have a mission center at central location of the Ao region for effective monitoring of the mission work and better outreach was felt and for this purpose a new mission center called Impur was established in the year 1894. It is still the headquarter of the Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang (ABAM) or Ao Baptist Church Association. The first Ao Baptist Church Association meet at Molungyimsen village in 1897 and the Churches in attendance were Molungkimong Baptist Church, Molungyimsen Baptist Church, Merangkong Baptist Church, Yajang Baptist Church, Wameken Baptist Church and Impur Baptist Church. Some of the literary work done by Mr. and Mrs. Clark are:

1. Mezung Ashiba (Ao Naga Primer No. 1) by Mrs, Clark, 1891.
2. Tanabuba Ashiba, (Ao Naga Primer No. 2) by Mrs. Clark, 1893.
3. Ao Grammar and Illustrated Phrases, by Mrs. Clark, 1893.
4. Yoseph Otzu (The story of Joseph) by Mr. Clark.
5. Tazungtsu Kaket (Ao Arithmetic) by Mrs. Clark, 1902.
6. Ao Folklore by Mrs. Clark.
7. Translated the gospel of Matthew, John, Acts, I Corinthians and some portion of the Psalms.
8. Other translation includes the Magnificat, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Nunc Dimittis.
9. Ao Naga Dictionary published in 1911.
10. Ao Hymnal of 125 hymns.

Ever since the split of the village on 24th October, 1876 the two villages have been in constant conflict till today over the establishment of the first Church in Naga soil arousing as a result of claims made by Molungyimsen village that their Church is the First Church in Naga soil. The claim of Molungyimsen village that all the converts from Molungkimong village went to the new village was proved wrong by the missionary records which shows that some Christians along with Godhula remained at Molungkimong. Dispute also rose between Molungkimong Baptist Church and Ao Baptist Church Association regarding this issue when Ao Baptist Church Association barred all other Ao Churches from participating in the centenary celebration of Molungkimong Baptist Church in 1972. After prolonged research and deliberation it was concluded that there has been continued existence of Christian members at Molungkimong village since 1872 and therefore it was right in celebrating centenary in 1972. Today the foundation day of Ao Baptist Church Association and Nagaland Baptist Church Council are celebrated basing on the establishment of the first Baptist Church at Molungkimong village on 22nd December, 1872. Molungyimsen Church further went on claiming their year of church establishment as 1872 on the ground that their church

was an extension of the church at Molungkimong village, but such claim has been refuted that since their village was founded on 1876 there cannot be church prior to that. A detailed documentation of this dispute has been compiled by N. Toshi Ao in *Ao Arogo Lipok Otsu: Tatalokba Kulitem*, 2012 (Genesis of Ao Baptist Church). An English version of the book is also available.

Today there are over 160 churches affiliated with ABAM and it is the largest Baptist Church Association affiliated with Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC). Today cent percent of Aos are Baptist Christian. ABAM is largely funded by the Baptist Churches affiliated with it and is a major sponsor of mission field across different states and country. It has established mission field in neighboring states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and neighboring country of Nepal, Myanmar and China.

References

1. Ao A, Bendangyabang. History of Christianity in Nagaland: A Source Material. Nagaland: Shalom Ministry Publication. 1998.
2. Ao, Bendangyabang A. History of Christianity in Nagaland: The Ao Naga tribal Christian mission enterprise 1872-1972. Nagaland: Shalom Ministry Publication. 2002.
3. Ao, Akangnungba. Supongmeren: The pathfinder for Godhula and E.W. Clark. Nagaland: Akangnungba Ao. 2010.
4. Ao, Kijung L. Nokinketer Mungchen. Nagaland: Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang. 1972.
5. Ao, Toshi N. Mission to The Nagas A Tryst with the Aos. Nagaland: N. Toshi Ao. 1995.
6. Ao, Toshi N. Mission Putu otsu. Nagaland: N. Toshi Ao. 1997.
7. Ao, Toshi N. Ao Arogo Lipok Otsu: Tatalokba Kulitem. Nagaland: Molungkimong Laisher Telongjem (MLT). 2012.
8. Ao, Lisen R. Dr. Clark's old Records and Documents. Nagaland: R. Lisen Ao Molungyimsen. 2013.
9. Clark, Mary Mead. A Corner in India. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society. 1907.
10. Jamir, Talitemjen N, Lanunungsang A. Naga Society And Culture (A Case Study of the Ao Naga Society and Culture). Nagaland: Nagaland University. 2005.
11. Kilep, Olem A. Laisher Mongchen. Nagaland: Molungyimsen Baptist Church. 1976.
12. Molungkimong Baptist Church. 125 Years of Molungkimong Baptist Church. The First Church In Nagaland 1872-1997. Nagaland: Molungkimong Baptist Church. 1997.
13. Molungkimong Baptist Church. A light to the Nagas. Nagaland: Molungkimong Baptist Church.
14. Nagaland Baptist Church Council. Nagaland Celebrates Quasqui Centennial (125 Years of Christianity). Kohima: Nagaland Baptist Church Council. 1997.
15. Robbins, Joel. Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture. *Current Anthropology*. 2007; 48(1):5-38.
16. Downs S, Frederick. The Mighty Works of God- A brief history of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India: The mission period 1836-1950. Guwahati: Christian Literature Centre. 1971-2014.
17. Shimmi YL. Comparative History of The Nagas: From Ancient Period Till 1826. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications. 1988.
18. Smith WC. The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd. 1925.