Abstract

Reform means giving a new form to any existing practices or body. Social reform movement is not a new phenomenon to any society. Every society has experienced it in one form or the other. But a social reform initiated by women in a patriarchal society is but rare, especially in a tribal society. Even to this day women participation in public spheres is very less and the reason for all these are attributed to social tradition and custom of the people which still believes that women’s responsibility is to take care of family. Social taboos are still found in many societies to some extent. Therefore, to see women in leadership position is still a kind of dream for many and also it is the biggest challenges. In the beginning of the 19th century a social reform movement took place in North East India under the leadership of one woman, Gaidinliu (popularly known as Rani Gaidinliu) among the male dominated Zeliangrong tribes of North East India. It was also a time, when Christian missionaries was spreading its tentacle among the tribal of North East. This was a big challenge for the champions of indigenous religion. Gaidinliu therefore took up a mission to reform indigenous religion and thus to uphold it. Under her leadership, the practices of animal sacrifices to various deities, a transformation from polytheism to monotheism etc. took place among the Zeliangrong tribes in North East India. In this paper attempt has been made to unfolded the whole process of social reform and the final transformation of free animal sacrifices in religious rites and transformation of polytheism to monotheism.

Key words: Reform, Zeliangrong, Gaidinliu, animal Sacrifices, Polytheism, Monotheism.

Introduction

Reform means a change into a new and improved form. According to New Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary, any issue that is connected with society and the way it is organized is called social and to improve a system, an organization, a law etc by making changes to it is called reform. Therefore, reform movements are not a radical changes but a modest transformation of existing system, an improvement from the existing system to suit the demands
or needs of the time. The social reform measures introduced by Gaidinliu also need to be studied on the light of above definition. The story of social reforms is not new in the history of human civilization. There have been many instances of reform movement in the past. The bigger question here is the circumstances that oblige society to reform the existing social system. Religion occupies an important place in the life of our society. It is the religious philosophy that guides and controls one attitude to the political, social and cultural life. Therefore most of good as well as evils practices of the human society; that have been reformed are found rooted in the religious belief or system of the society. The Sati practices, child marriage, untouchability etc of Indian society are all rooted in the belief system of the society. Religion as defined by the Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary is “the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them”. Religion is not only about belief or faith and worship; it is the roots of ethics, norms, and values etc that are the guiding principles of any given society. Men from the ages have belief in the benefits of proper performance of religious action or observance. They perform religious observance with a hope for health, wealth, material well being, success in hunting, admission of soul in paradise etc. Since religious is one of the guiding principle of our social conducts, most of the social reforms measures started from religious practices and belief system of the society. Reformations aims could be therefore, as varied as human welfare as its objective and it could be spiritual and salvation as their main concern.

Methodology:

This is basically a qualitative research. Therefore as in case of other qualitative research data were collected, analyse and then interpreted. It is a historical study, which discuss the past events to understand the present condition. For the sources or data, both primary and secondary sources have been widely used. Since the society under study is basically an oral society, interview method have also been used extensively while collection the data and sources of information.

Objective of the study:

1) To study the ancient religious tradition of Zeliangrong Naga society before the advent of the Christian missionaries in North East India.
2) To study the impact of the coming of Christian missionaries among the Zeliangrong Nagas in North East India.
3) To study the religious reform measures introduce by Gaidinliu and its impact.
A brief overview of social reform movements: The History of Social Reformations is as old as the history of human civilization. Starting from the global perspective, one of the largest religious reform movements was protestant movement started by Luther Martin; a German clergy against the immoral activities of Pope and Catholic Churches as an institution. The movement started by Luther also encourages or inspired John Calvin; a Frenchman by birth and founder of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, to start similar reform movement and resulted in a large-scale protestant movement in Europe. The protestant or reformation movement of the church mainly started as a protest against the ‘indulgences’ of the Pope which however, turned into political issue in the long run. Back home in India, the Sixth Century India also witnessed the emergence of many protestant religions as the lower section of the society; especially Vaishya or business class, were looking to set up an egalitarian society as their prosperous economy failed to uplift their social status in the four folded social system of the Hindu Society. Back home in Assam the 15th Century Vaishnavite Saint Sankerdev attempt to remove the monotheism tradition by emphasizing full devotion to Lord Vishnu and thus simplify the traditions of prayer to multiple God or Goddess. This reform movement has also introduced many changes in the social structure of Assamese society. The 19th Century India also witnessed many reform movement and emergence of many liberal religions like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Prarthana Samaj etc. Therefore, the tradition of reform is not a new phenomenon but has been recorded in history since long.

Nearer home in North East India the most prominent social movement among the indigenous hill community was the Seng Khasi movement. It was a movement for preservation of the indigenous culture and religion from the rapid spread of Christian faith and western culture. The Seng Khasi – a social and cultural organization was established on 23rd November, 1899 by Jeebon Roy, an illustrious Khasi from Meghalaya. It was a direct reaction to the rapid expansion and Christian conversion which ignite some Khasi to form an organization whose goal was to work for preservation and promotion of their ancient traditional religion. Some of the main objectives of the organization included preservation of Kinship institute call Kur and Kha, to encourage traditional sports like archery, organized traditional festivals, promote education etc. In their attempt to promote Khasi language and culture as well as education, the Seng Khasi received support and encouragement from pan Indian social organizations like Ram Krishna Mission and Arya Samaj. Even today the Seng Khasi as a social and cultural organization is working actively among the Khasi people of Meghalaya. As we proceed further one would find
that, the Heraka Movement started by Gaidinliu is in many ways similar to the Seng Khasi Movement in term of preservation of ancient institutions with certain reforms.

**Advent of Christian Missionaries:** The religious tradition of the Zeliangrong has undergone tremendous changes in the 20th century. There are two factors responsible for this change. One was the coming of the Christian missionaries and secondly, the socio-religious reformation movement that started in Manipur in the 1930’s and resurgence of the same movement in 1970’s in all the Zeliangrong areas of North East India under the leadership of Gaidinliu.

As the Zeliangrong populations are spread over the three main administrative divisions, they came under the influence of the churches from different group. In Naga Hill (now Nagaland) and Manipur the message of Christianity was brought to the Zeliangrong by the American Baptist Missionary. In Naga Hills the first main centre of the American Baptist missionaries was ‘Impur Centre’ in the Ao Naga areas. This was setup way back in 1874 from where they spread their wings in all Naga areas. In Manipur William Pettigrew was the first missionary who entered Imphal in 1894 but, as majority of the Meitei had already accepted Hinduism under the patronage of King Garibh Niwas (1709-1894) he established his centre at Ukhrul among the Thangkul Nagas in the hill. But the Zeliangrong came into contact with the Christian wave much later. The Zeliangrong Nagas in Naga Hill came into contact with the American Missionaries through the Angami Nagas. Around 1905 one Keneise and Nsarangbe of Benreu village were the first convert among the Zeliangrong Nagas in Naga Hills. In Tamenglong area of Manipur the Zeliangrong people came into contact with the Christianity through their Naga Hills counterpart as well as their neighbouring community Thangkul Nagas and Thadou-Kuki. In Tamenglong areas one K.Narijinpou aka Maipak was the first convert among the Zeliangrong. He converted into Christianity on 6th December, 1914. As the western extension of the Zeliangrong inhabited areas in present N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) district touched the eastern boundary of Meghalaya, the first wave of Christianity in Zeliangrong area of N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) came from Welsh Mission who were concentrated in Meghalaya. The first converted among the Zeliangrong Nagas in N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) area was one Dituing Pame of Nnareram (now Melangpeu-ram) village who converted into Christianity sometimes in 1910. He was converted into Christian by a Baite school master. By the mid 1950’s a considerable chunk of the Zeliangrong Nagas had discarded their old age religious traditions and accepted Christianity.
Another change in their religious traditions came about after Gaidinliu started socio-religious reformation movement. The movement started in the 1930’s was curbed by the colonial authority due to its political overtone along with religious works. But the movement emerged in the 1974 with the formation of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North East India under the leadership of Gaidinliu. As a result of this reform movement they discarded many practices of the previous traditions of olden days. The reform religion is called Heraka, derived from the two Zeliangrong words Hera i.e. small deities and Ka i.e. barrier or fence. They called it a pure religion free from smaller deities unlike in the olden days. True to the meaning of their religion, they believe in the existence of a solitary and supreme god Tingwang.

Thus the advent of the Christianity and the reformation movement led by Gaidinliu let to the emergence of three religious groups – Christian, Heraka and followers of old age practice. The old age practice is called Paupaise i.e. Grand-parents religion; a name probably given by the followers of Christianity and Heraka.

The impact of the advent of Christian missionaries: The impact of the advent of Christian missionaries among the tribal people of North East India has been observed by many scholars in recent time. The socio-cultural impact of the missionaries has been express by G.P.Singh in the following words –

‘In the 19th century missionaries started converting the tribal people to Christianity in the name of spreading education. Towards the end of that century and in the early decades of the 20th century, the tribes found out that missionaries basic purpose was to root out the native culture, bring the tribes under western influence, denationalize them and thus to place the British rule on a secure footing. This set off a chain reaction by way of rediscovery of their own socio-cultural roots as well as the religio-cultural tradition. The tribal reactions to the process of conversion as resorted to by the missionaries found expression in the form of various socio-religious reform movement……’.

It is not that the earlier convert were easily accepted by the society. The earlier convert has to encounter many hiccups. There were cases where the new converts were socially boycotted by the villagers. They were forced out of the villages and compelled to set up a new colony for the new religion group. They were however backed by the Missionaries who obviously had their contact with the with rulers. Therefore, the arrival of the Missionaries and emergence of new converts generate social tension in the Zeliangrong society. Christianity brought along its train education, medical services, and many more mode of development. No
one can deny the contribution of the Christian missionaries in the development of literature and script. But under the skirt of education and civilization mission they resorted to large-scale religious conversion of the indigenous people. By the beginning of 20th century the negative impact of Christian missionaries to denude the native of their culture and replaced them with western culture became more apparent.

The new convert questions the relevant or logic of sacrifices and adherence to numerous deities. Traditionally, the Zeliangrong Nagas or Nagas in general, are known for their lavish lifestyle spending their wealth on feasts and rituals. On the other hand, most of their rice field used to have very poor yielding because of their primitive technology and lack of devotion to cultivation works as they have to spare several days of the year for feast, rites and rituals by abstaining from jhum works. One coming under the influence of church, the new convert would question the lavish lifestyle and their love for drinking rice beer when they do not have enough food-stock for a year. Slowly and slowly the rank and file of the new faith increase, as the missionaries would adopted numerous strategies to win over the people to their camp. In most places, they could successfully attract big chunk of the people to their fold.

Religious works in colonial days: As observed by Stephen Fuch, the state of strong exposure and overwhelming meddling by an outsider’s culture could results in mental tension and material distress of the existing civilization. In such a situation, one of the best ways to bring back people faith and a sense of pride on their traditional religious and faith was to remove blind faith of sacrifices and related taboos. As conversion to Christianity slowly penetrates into the interior of Zeliangrong villages Jadonang, a youth from Puilun village in Tamenglong Manipur realized the threat to their traditional institutions. Therefore, he initiates a movement for the preservation and elevation of their indigenous or traditional socio-religious customs against the rapid spread of Christianity. Jadonang started his movement around the year 1927-28. Gaidinliu, then a young girl of around 13 from Longkao village also joined him.

Some authors have attributed the advent of Christian missionaries as the main factors for the religious reform movement. But, Christianity among the Zeliangrong was at its nascent stage in the 1930’s when Jadonang and Gaidinliu initially started their mission. While it is not to deny the threat of Christian Missionaries, it was neither the main forces in the 1930s. On the otherhand, if there were threat from the outside forces like Christian missionaries, there was no social unity among their people. Jadonang believed that he could not only bring social unity but also freed the people from superstitious and obscurantist religion practice, if he could bring the
three cognate group i.e. Zeme, Liame/Liangmei and Rongmei under the banner of one name and one religion group. Therefore the seeds of the formation of Zeliangrong as a unified community which finally took its shape in the 1940’s were visualized by Jadonang decades before its final formation. With this mission he started his campaign initially touring the villages and preaching about the need of reform in religious practices. Along with his preaching he also healed the sick as he was acquainted with traditional medicinal knowledge. Since their first meet, Gaidinliu became a constant companion of Jadonang. Now Jadonang along with Gaidinliu move around Zeliangrong villages preaching the story of ‘Golden Old days’ of their fathers from oral tales. They started preaching about various problems engulfing the Zeliangrong society including their religious traditions.

It is believed by their followers that they drew an inspiration for reform works from their pilgrimage to Bhuvan Cave. Reform work initially started among the Rongmei sub group of the Zeliangrong in Manipur hills. Abrupt change of the established practices was bound to be resisted, therefore reform measures was adopted in a careful and slow manners. At the initial stage Jadonang and Gaidinliu asked their people to stop worship to smaller deities. Instead, they are told to worship and offer sacrifices to one and only Tingwang (in Zeme) or Tingkao Raguang (in Rongmei). They advocate that Tingwang is present everywhere but he cannot be seen with naked eye. It is essential to have a clean place to offer prayer to him. Accordingly, they instructed their people to construct a prayer hall in their villages and also taught them devotional song and hymns. Slowly and slowly their tentacles spread among the Zeme and Liangmei sub-group of the Zeliangrong as well.

As Jadonang and Gaidinliu also have a political mission to liberate their people from the British control, Jadonang was arrested and was implicated in murder case without evidence with an intention to tarnish his image. Finally he was hanged on 29th August 1931 at Imphal. Gaidinliu therefore, continued the mission. But due to political obligation, she fled from Manipur in early 1931 and took shelter among the Zeme Nagas sub-group, in present Dima Hasao area far-away from the Rongmei people to whom the two leaders actually belong. After her arrival in the Zeme area, the first reform message passed on people by Gaidinliu was to stop the practice consulting the diviner or prophecy. She also asked her people to stop the practice of Nnarei-reibe a practice where the new born are not given a usual community funeral if the baby die within one month of birth. This two are the only important reform message passed by Gaidinliu before her arrest. Not before long, Gaidinliu was also arrested in 1932 and was confined in jail till 1947. As Gaidinliu
fled from the Rongmei; sub-group of Zeliangrong, dominated areas after the arrest of Jadonang, their reform mission remain incomplete among the Rongmei. No doubt, a big chunk of Rongmei followed whatever Jadonang and Gaidinliu taught them in the formative years and named the reform religion as Tingkao-Raguang which is popular among the Rongmei population in Imphal valley. There are certain similarities between Tingkao-Raguang Chapriak and Heraka group. They also have a temple of their own. Like Heraka group their religious practices are different from Paupaise Chapriak or Paupaise group. This Tingkao Raguang group claim themselves as the primordial Zeliangrong religion. They are believed to have influence by Jadonang religious teaching.

Gaidinliu and Jadonang also divided their respective work areas on their last pilgrimage. Gaidinliu was told to work in the area West of Barak River and Jadonang East of the Barak. Slowly the hills area of Manipur was however passed into the grip of the Church. It was the Zeme sub-group of present Dima Hasao area of Assam as well as Peren district in Nagaland and a section of Liangmei of the same area where Gaidinliu reform measures are popularly accepted.

A look into Some of the main feature of Zeliangrong forefathers’ religious traditions and its origin:- The significance and importance of reform measures introduced by Gaidinliu among the Zeliangrong could be understood if only one have clear ideas about the existing system that necessitate introduction of reform measures. It is therefore, pertinent to first have a glimpse of the socio-religious feature of the Zeliangrong society in the pre-reform days. A better understanding of the background of the reform movement especially, those of religious feature could give us a clear picture, as Gaidinliu has mainly focused in the religious aspect of the Zeliangrong community in her reform work. The traditional religion or religious practices of Zeliangrong forefathers has no original name as such. It is for the convenience of terminology, the old age religion has been described as Paupaise in this work. Paupai means grandparents and se means tradition. The study area of the on the religious tradition of the Zeliangrong Nagas has been mainly confined to N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao), Assam, for the reason that, most of the followers of reform religion are found in N.C.Hills area of Assam. In Manipur there are two or three village one being the ancestral village of Gaidinliu Longkao and the other two in the extreme North of Manipur bordering Nagaland. In Nagaland although majority of Zeliangrong has adopted Christianity, there are dozens of villages who stick to the reform religion. To begin with, a first glimpse into the some of the main feature of traditional Zeliangrong Naga religion and society of the pre reform days.
The concept of God: Many writers or authors have described the traditional religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas as animist. First coined by E.B Tylor to define early religion of North America, the religion ideas influenced by the spiritual beings like spirit, souls, genies (a spirit with magic power) deities proper etc are called animist. The spirit or deities are a living-like man but invisible and the power ascribe to them is different from ordinary man and they acted as a conscious agent. This term is now being use to describe the religion of the indigenous communities in India.

As traditional religion of the Zeliangrong Naga believes in the existence of multiple God, spirits and deities it is polytheism in nature. They believe that various deities or spirit influences their religious and social life. Such deities are propitiated by offering sacrifice of animal, fowl etc. in time of needs. Some of these deities are not benevolent and malevolent. Hence, they are appeased by offering. If they are satisfied, they can be benevolent.

Of the entire list God or Goddess, the Tingwang (literally translate the Universal God or King) is the most powerful and the authority of the whole universe. He is invisible but, he is present everywhere. He has an extraordinary power Tingwang and he is the supreme of the whole universe. Interestingly, although he is considered as the Supreme God, above all God or Goddess, he is never invoked in any prayer or offering in the Paupaise tradition. He is the creator of the whole universe. The entire universe is his creation directly or indirectly. All the actions of the smaller Gods or Goddesses are done at the direct or indirect order of Tingwang.

Next to Tingwang there is no clear hierarchical order of the God or Goddess. These smaller God or Goddesses are best translated as deity. For the Zeliangrong, there is only one Tingwang– the Supreme and universal God. The numerous other God or Goddesses who are not Tingwang are named or address by their common name called Hera. They are not on the same rank as Tingwang although; they are mostly invoked by the Zeliangrong forefathers in prayer, instead of Tingwang. Among them one of the oldest deity is Heratingrang-pui a female deity who according to Zeliangrong believes gave an anatomy structure to human body at the time of birth. The longevity of human age, gender, health etc is all believed to have been fixed by Heratingrang-pui before a child touches her/his feet on the earth.

The second in term of seniority order could be Banglawang: He is the son of Tingwang who obtained permission from his father Tingwang to rule over the earth. All the living being, rivers, mountain, hills and mountains etc are all created at his supervision. Apart from all these earlier deities known to the Zeliangrong ancestors, the name of some other popular deities
includes Kechingpeu, Mishniu, Chiprai or Herawang (literally translate as the God of the Gods and Goddesses), Helu, Nrak, Mekhang, Heransia, and Hechawang etc. Interestingly apart from Heratingrang-pui pui, Hezale and Kamadile the rest are all male. Hezale and Kamadile are not invoked or considered in any rituals etc. Rituals and prayers are offered to overcome their grievances or problems.

Although they do not worship all of them, they are some of the known deities to the Zeliangrong forefathers. Most of these deities are assigned with their respective role. Zeliangrong forefathers therefore offer prayer to various deities according to the nature of their grievances. To narrate it in a simple word, each deity are endowed with different responsible like the democratic government being run by various ministers with the Head at the top, but they do not pray the one at the top of the hierarchy.

Each deity is also assigned with their dwelling place. Tingwang is believed to dwell in heaven from where he can oversee the whole universe. Banglawang after his departure from this world live below the earth. Most of these deities known to Zeliangrong forefathers are however are earthly God who dwelt in the hills or mountain. For instance, the Zeliangrong identified Borail Range in N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) area as the home of Kechingpeu. Bhubon Hill in Cachar as the abode of Mishniu. Mt Kacha or Ketcha in trans Manipur-Nagaland border, as the abode of Chiprai or Herawang etc.

The village deity: Apart from the above accounts of numerous deities mentioned above, each and every village has their village deity which they called Tesuang. The Zeliangrong believe that all the mountain and high hill, peak etc are dwelling place of a deity or spirit. Such deity who lives nearest to the village is chosen as the village deity i.e. Tesuang. He is considered as the defender of the village from other malevolent deities. The village therefore offer prayer to him whenever the village are under threat from enemy like head hunters, epidemic etc.

The Village priest Tingkupau: The village priest is the most important person in the religious life of the Zeliangrong village. Almost all the rites and rituals in the village are performed by him. The responsibility of village priest is automatically entrusted to the oldest male member of the village. There is no formal training to become a village priest, experience and age qualified him for the responsibility. He has his subordinate numbering three to five depending on the size of the population. On the demise of the priest the oldest of his subordinate succeeded him. An important point to be noted here is the domination of the male on this respectful position. No women are allowed to occupy the position of priest. Nor are women
allowed to partake in the ritual process. Even in the household rituals, which are performed by the oldest members of the family, a family would instead approach the oldest male relative from the extended family but would not allow the mother or grandmother to perform the rites.

**Hejua Tekung and Herateube Bam:** Any discussion on the religious tradition of the Zeliangrong Naga would be incomplete without reference to *Hejua Tekung* and *Herateube Bam*. *Hejua* is a spot in the village where there is a permanent pitch for long jump sport. It is the place where ceremonial long jump competitions are held during *Hega Ngi* festival. At the point where the youth take off while jumping, there is a medium size stone supported by other smaller stones. This stone is called *Hejua-tekung* and the loose earth where the jumper landed is called *Hejua*. *Hejua* and *Hejua Tekung* are considered the heart or alter stone of the village. In olden days eggs are offered at the stone to the village deity *Tesuang*, before the ceremonial lungjum competition during *Hega Ngi* festival. These offerings are made to ward off the evil spirit and invoke the village deity to protect them for injury free during competition.

Another important landmark of every traditional Zeliangrong village is *Herateube bam*; an offering spot. It is located at the outskirt of the village where most of the important rituals and sacrifices are perform by the village priest. This two places or spot are of utmost important for the village in term of rituals activities.

**The role of Prophecies or diviner:** Another feature of the traditional Zeliangrong religious system was the role played by the diviner or medicine men. Whenever there is sick or misfortune occurred in the family, they would consult the *Kemeume* (prophecies or diviner). The diviner would then tell the reasons for sick or misfortune. In case other misfortune such as accident etc they would depend on such men for treatment. They would not only reveal the name of deity who is not not happy but the way to appease him as well. Such as to offer ritual with sacrifices of fowl, goat etc. according to the nature of misfortune or ailments. This way the diviner or prophecy also played an influential role in their religious life.

It was in this background, the practice of animal sacrifices in all the ritual started in Zeliangrong religious tradition. It is their belief that the deity or spirit takes away the spirit of the sacrifice animal and in return the sick get cured or the pests are kept off the jhum field. Sometime symbolic offering are also given by way of keeping separate meals for the deity from the cook of sacrificed meat.

**Animal sacrifice:** In the traditional Zeliangrong religion practices, rites, rituals and offerings are also closely associated with the various festivals they observed throughout the year.
Therefore, an observation on various rites and rituals associated with their festivals is vital to understand the traditional social and religious life of the Zeliangrong. Animal sacrifices constitute one of the main components of traditional Zeliangrong religious system. These sacrifices are offered to appease or propitiated the deity, sometimes for good harvest, for protection of crops etc from pest and sometimes for recovery from human sick or ailments. As per oral traditions cited above, animal sacrifices or worshipped to numerous deities was not practices in the beginning. But in the middle age the tradition of animal sacrifices to appease different deities has deeply crept into their society.

**Symbol or sign in the religion:** Mere sacrifice of animal in rituals is not enough in many cases. There are many sign or symbols which are consider crucial with regard to the fulfillment of the purpose of sacrifices. For example - When a fowl is sacrificed, it is killed by strangulated and the foul is held straight by one hand holding it on the neck. As the foul struggle to die one leg overlaps the other and vice versa. If the right leg covers or overlaps over the left leg when the fowl finally die, it is consider a good sign. For some sacrifices the colour and pattern of hair or feather on the body of the animal/chick is also examined meticulously. For example, if a pig is offer to Chiprai for the good harvest, a pig with reddish elongated nose is considered bad omen. Such pigs are notorious for greedy and restless nature. Such pig if sacrifices can influence the wild beast with their restless nature and harm the crops. Such foul or discrepancies are examined by the diviner or prophecy and sometimes by elders.

**Natural phenomenon and religious belief:** Various form of natural phenomenon has also influences Zeliangrong traditional society to a large extends. In case of natural phenomenon such an earthquake, hailstorm/stone raining etc. they observe a day abstaining from normal works. In case of excessive rains, especially at the beginning of agriculture cycle before their jhum is put on fire, they would invoke the rain god to stop raining by offering chicks. In case of excessive dry also they perform rituals. In case their crops are attacked by pest, they perform rituals etc. With so much of rituals, but less practical approaches to tackles natural problems, the practices have tremendous negative impact on societal economy and life.

**Numerous occasions for abstain from normal work during rituals and festivals:** Another feature of the traditional religious practices is the numerous occasion of observation and festivals. Not all the occasion can be counted as festivals. But on each and every stage of agricultural practices there is a feast of two or three days, some even lasted for weeks or more. There are around 35 or more occasions. If one goes to count the total numbers of days observed
by abstaining from works in one particular year, the numbers would cross 80 days or more. So, it was a big hindrance to their daily activities especially as they usually remains abstain from work in almost all rituals and festivals.

**Taboos, restriction gender segregation:** Another feature of traditional religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas is the numerous taboos and gender segregations. Almost all the festivals as mentioned above are accompanied by village rituals. Most of such occasions are accompanied by restriction from works, journey by the host villager and also restriction from the entry to the village by outsiders. On such occasions the village entrance are kept close by the village youth. A visit to work or journey and the entry of outsiders into the village according to their believes could spoil the sanctity of the occasion. The Zeliangrong man also maintains gender segregation on most occasions of rituals. On the night preceding the village or household rituals, even the couple stay away from each others. The entry into the village by an outsider who does not observe such restriction could harm the purpose of the ritual.

Gender discrimination is largely seen in religious activities. Women during menses are considered impure. The meat of the animal killed during the village rituals are distributed to the household but, on most occasion women are not allowed to share the meat. *Hega Ngi* is considered as the most important festival of the Zeliangrong Nagas but ironically it is the occasion where gender segregation is largely practiced. During this festival the male population; both married and unmarried, stay away from women. They even fetch new spoon and plates and cook from separate fire not touched by their women. As the village boys enjoy singing and dancing moving from one house to others, the grown up girl are not allow to join in the merry making. This has been the feature on most occasions of the festivals. Women are mostly excluded from any kind of religious activities. A man on hunting mission strictly stays away from women, as it could bring back luck for him.

**Life after death, heaven and the world of the death:** The Zeliangrong beliefs that the spirit live after life. According to them human bodies die when the spirit left the mortal remain but the spirit never die. Infact when the family members die in a year, they always kept a separate plate for the death members on each meal of the family, until the final parting ceremony which is held before the commencement of *Hega Ngi*, the most important festival which is observed before the commencement of new agriculture cycle. The death according to them lingers in the house until the final parting ceremony at *Hekak Ngi* day of *Hega Ngi* festival.
They do not have the concept of Heaven and hell but they believe in reborn of the spirit. A good person is reborn with a better life from the previous one as a reward but a bad person may take a re-born in the form of animal as punishment for the wrong deed of previous life. Because of the believe in rebirth, they put a marks on the body of the death when their love ones die with a wish for the rebirth in their family. After several round of reborn the last phase is reached when the spirit took the form of dew that ended with a drop. The world of the spirit of death persons is called Heruimeram. The spirit of the death persons after they are forced out of the village during Hega Ngi festival lived there till their destiny is decided. Therefore, when a person dies, all the material requires in the daily life of the earthly world are also buried with the mortal remains. It is believe that the death take those materials for his/her use at Heruimeram.

**Village Economy and religion:** Another feature of the Paupaise religious tradition of the Zeliangrong Nagas is their close association with the village economy. Most of the rites rituals observed or perform in the village are closely associated with their agriculture works and different stages of execution of agriculture works. Such as Mapelai – observed before sowing vegetables like Taro/arum, maize etc., Helei– observed before sowing of rice, Nchang – observed at the end of rice sowing, Hemeubui/Hemeuteube-nna observed before the commencement of harvest, Phuakpet and Nsim ‘ngi basically a festival of the youth and observed at the end harvesting of ‘early rice’ and before harvesting of ‘late rice’, Hega ‘ngi the year’s ending festivals. In almost all the numerous festivals observed as per different stages of agriculture execution, they perform rituals, observes certain restrictions and taboos as well as appeal to the unseen God or deity; mostly to Chiprai or Herawang in all crops related festivals to let their crops grow abundantly and to protect them from wild birds, insect, rats and other unforeseen natural factors or forces. That is why they strictly observe religious rites, while enjoying the feast; they also observe certain restrictions and taboos as a token of their surrender to God’s supremacy.

These are in short some of the main feature of the religious tradition and ideas of the Zeliangrong Nagas. As mentioned in the beginning, the influx of Christianity and the social and religious reformation movement has brought about many changes in the religious tradition of the Zeliangrong Nagas. But while Christianity has totally discarded the early traditions; the Heraka group has retained many elements of the olden days. The main difference between the pre-reform tradition and Heraka is the total stopped of animal sacrifices in Heraka, curtailment in the numbers of village rituals and festivals, free from many taboos and most important, a
transformation from Polytheism to Monotheism. All religions are fundamentally true and are designed to fulfill the need of given society of the time. Hence it is impossible to give them a hierarchical rank of the merit and demerit. True to this, it also applies to the Zeliangrong Nagas religious traditions and the changes on it.

**Religious reformation mission under Gaidinliu and formation of Zeliangrong Heraka Association:** In the Post Colonial India the year 1974 may be considered as the turning point of Gaidinliu social reform movement. It was in this year Gaidinliu with active support of N.C.Zeliang’s; a Christian theologian turned champion of Gaidinliu cause, the Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North East India was formed during the first General Conference of Heraka followers at Ntangkam Village in Nagaland. Under the banner of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North East India, Gaidinliu introduces the reform works.

The Association was formed with the slogan of ‘Loss of religion is loss of culture, loss of culture is loss of identity’. The Association believes that, religion or religious practices of a community or society is a vital part of culture and identity. Therefore, to preserve or uphold one own culture, preservation of traditional religion is essential. Like wise to preserve one own identity, preservation of culture is essential. To preserve their old age religious practices with so many taboos and restriction was not in the interest of the contemporary times. Therefore, guided by the vision of Gaidinliu religious reform measures were carried out under the banner of the Association.

In order to ensure that their reform measures donot detached them from their natural surrounding and roots, around which the Zeliangrong culture was molded, there was enough space for the old practices despite reforms. These were also reflected in the logo of the Association as well. As explained in their holy text ‘Tingwang Hingde’.

![Figure 1: The Logo of Zeliangrong Heraka Association.](image-url)
Explanation of Logo:

**The Banana-plantain:** Banana plantain in the middle of the logo symbolize ‘pure or chaste and truth’. It says that Heraka believe in one and one supreme God Tingwang and he is prayed by people who are pure and chaste; spiritually and physically.

**The hills:** The three Hill symbolize mother earth. As the child is given birth to and brought up by mother, God has created life on earth and to survive the life he has created the earth. Hence, the earth is the Mother of the natural world.

**Sea/Water:** It symbolizes unity and peace. As different water from rivers flows into the sea, all religion in the whole world leads to Supreme God Tingwang. Irrespective of difference in philosophy, the purpose of all religion is same. The day the whole world started to believe in the existing of one Supreme God Tingwang, there will be peace in the world like the water of the sea. It also symbolizes unity and peace among Zeliangrong despite of difference.

**The Sun:** It symbolizes strength and divine knowledge. Of all the creation of God, the sun is the strongest and indispensable for the survival of all the creatures. No creature can survive without the Sun. The Sun is therefore symbolized Strength or power.

There is no knowledge in the darkness. The power of the sun illuminates the whole universe. Hence, the sun is not only the source of energy and power but, it is also the source of divine knowledge.

As mentioned earlier Gaidinliu first call of reform was to stop consulting prophecy and stop the practice of *Nnarei-reibe*; the practice of not giving the usual community funeral to a baby who die within a month of birth. Very soon she however went underground again. Soon after her surrender in 1966 she was mostly concentrated on the political movement to secured integration of Zeliangrong areas of North East India. Formation of *Zeliangrong Heraka Association* in 1974 was a big turning point. After the formation of *Zeliangrong Heraka Association* reform measures were codified and introduced to the public after proper deliberation and consultations.

The first ever reform measures was introduced and circulated in a written form was in 1976 when Gaidinliu in a meeting with the leaders of Zeliangrong Heraka Leaders Council Members on 2nd April, 1976 asked for changes in some of the earlier social and religious practices of her people. Many reform measures of the earlier stages were subjected to further reform at the later stages.
Following were the first reform measures introduced in phase manner by Gaidinliu under the banner of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, North East India since 1974.

**Birth Ceremony of a baby:** The first reform measures introduced in a written form was a guideline issued to be followed by followers. She could foresee people reluctant to accept drastic change of established practices. The first guidelines, therefore was only an instruction to the followers to observe certain procedure while welcoming birth of a new baby at home. It says that within five days of the birth, a suitable name of a baby should be given and on the fifth day a prayer of expressing gratitude to *Tingwang* and seeking his blessing for the baby should be given by offering of chick, pig etc; according to one choice. A baby should be taken outdoor to the sun for the first time since birth. If the baby dies within five days, no formal burial should be conducted.

**To stop practices of Prophesy:** In the same letter a call was given out to stop practices of prophesy and consultation of diviner in case of misfortune or sick. A call was given to believe and have faith in one and only *Tingwang* (Universal Lord). This was significant change towards devotion to *Tingwang* and was a big step towards transforming Zeliangrong from polytheism to monotheism.

**Offering during sickness:** In case of sickness or misfortune a prayer to only *Tingwang* should be invoked for the longevity and in case of death for wellbeing of departed spirit. No animal should be offered in the initial stage. If the sickness prolonged a chick, pig and lastly a goat may be offered to *Tingwang*. This was also a strategy of winning over the support of the people for reform measures by avoiding drastic change of earlier practices. In this manner reform process was initiated in a passive manner in the beginning.

**Final call to stop animal sacrifices:** After few years of this call to minimize animal sacrifices, a final call to stop animal sacrifice was given. This was done after consultation and long debates. This was one of the most important reform measures with far reaching effect adopted by the reformer and accepted her followers. As observed from the above discussion almost every festival and rites and ritual of Zeliangrong traditional society are accompanied by sacrifices of cattle or fowl. Gaidinliu observed that this practice has becomes a burden to the believers instead of doing any good to the people; spiritually and materially. By way of minimizing the numbers of festivals and rituals Gaidinliu has already reduced the burden of ritual to a large extends. But at the initial stage she continued sacrifices of fowl or cattle. It was her strategy as it was not easy to erase the established traditions from the public memory. The
final call to stopped any kind of sacrifices during festivals or ritual was announced during the 17th General Conference of Zeliangrong Heraka Association during the 10th and 11th January, 1990 at Kipeilo Village, Assam. A resolution to this effect was also taken at the Advisory Meeting of regional Zeliangrong Heraka Association on 18th December, 1989 at Boro Henam village. Henceforth, the followers of Heraka have given up the practice of animal sacrifice or offering.

**Called to worship Tingwang:** At the initial stage, Gaidinliu continued the earlier practices of offering prayer to Herawang alias Chiprai in all rites and offering related to wealth and crop while in case of prayer for human-wellbeing Tingwang was invoked. Paying obeisance to Herawang alias Chiprai in all ritual related to crops is an old tradition which was continued by Gaidinliu but, with an aims to curtail obeisance to numerous smaller deities Gaidinliu asked her people to abandon all the smaller deities including Herawang alias Chiprai in all festivals, rites and ritual but to pray to Tingwang only. Thus a final transmission from polytheism to monotheism was effected. A resolution to these effects was taken during the 12th General Conference of Zeliangrong Heraka Association held during 6th and 6th January, 1985 at B.Jalukie, Nagaland.

**Curtailment of numbers of Festivals and rituals:** As seen above, there are numerous festivals, rites and rituals observed by the Zeliangrong people throughout the year. To do away with some smaller festivals and rituals without entirely dethatching traditional festivals, and their importance, Gaidinliu asked her people to observed only important festivals of the year. She instructed her people to continued the Helei (Sowing festival), Phuakpet (Pre-harvest festival) and Hega Ngi (the annual festival) only. Earlier Hega Ngi lasted for a month but the numbers of the days was also curtailed to 3 (three) days.

The list of important festivals which are observed according to agriculture cycle are as follows – 1.Helei (Sowing festival), 2.Nchang Ngi (Post sowing festival), 3.Hemeubui (Harvesting festival) 4.Puak pet and Nsim Ngi (Post Harvest), and 5.Hega Ngi (Year ending festival).

At household level a generous and wealthy household may continued the practice of Kereudungbe (the feast of merit) on such occasion, the host organised a feast for the entire villagers for several days. In return the young boys and girls of the village entertain the host by singing and dances. It lasted for two to three days. The highest harvester of rice in a year may
also offer feast to close relative and villagers which is call Heduara/Hecheura. This is a kin to thanks giving to Tingwang for abundant harvest.

Reform on Bride Price: Gaidinliu also called for putting a bar at the bride price during matrimonial ceremony of a couple. In traditional society, it was the practices of a bride parents to demand a bride price from grooms family. They may demand; a part from cash, moveable and immovable property including domestic animals like cow, bull, bison etc and other valuable ornaments. In a day fixed for discussion and finalization of marriage, a group of senior male members from the groom side would visit bride parents, who on their part also called in their male relatives for discussion. The two sides would engage in a bargain for the bride price. While the bride side bargains for minimization and the groom side for maximization of the price. If in case the groom parents failed to please the bride party, sometimes the groom party has to return home humiliated and angry. Even, if the marriage finally takes place, the issue sometime becomes a matter of nuptial discord of the newlyweds. Gaidinliu considered it a social evil equivalent to selling of a daughter like a commodity. Therefore, a bar was put on the bride price demanded by the parents. A resolution to this effect was taken not to demand and pay a bride price of more than Rs 500/-. As per tradition, the groom party has to give Hetiakuak, usually a brass plate and in return the bride party offer Paisua (double set of a traditional shawl for the groom) to the groom.

Step to avoid early marriage of young girl: In olden days, when a boy or girl attained the age of eight or nine, they are suppose to sleep at their respective village dormitory. Till her marriage the girl continues to sleep there and in case of boys, a year or two even after marriage if he wishes. Because of the absence of parents’ vigilance at night, a girl usually started courting with boys at her dormitory by the time she attained her puberty. Gaidinliu considered it morally incorrect for a girl or boys to start courting at the early age before marriage. Therefore, as a step to discourage early marriage and immoral activities among young girl, a resolution was taken to reward a girl who could preserve her dignity till her marriage. As a token of praise and respect to such young girl it was decided to collect a sum of Rs. 101/- from the groom while collecting a bride price of Rs.500/- as mentioned. Such women are called Pumsang-gei-pungme. They are put in high esteem by the society.

Divorce: In traditional society there are no established and common guidelines or code to be followed by a couple in case of divorce. As such a favorable judgment generally goes to the male. In most cases the issues are confined to the husband and wife and their immediately
relatives. After reformation it was decided that the issues of divorce should be dealt with according to new regulation of Zeliangrong Heraka tradition and regulations. A system of penalty to be paid by the husband or wife who so ever committed the mistakes has been introduced. If divorce happens due to husband fault, he has to pay a penalty to be fixed by the Association from time to time and vice versa.

**Reform and Disposal of death and creation of burial ground:** In earlier days the burial rites of death are perform according to the nature or causes of death. Two distinct features of death according to them are natural and un-natural death. As for example, If a women dies during delivery, it is considered un-natural. Therefore, the body is left inside the house without performing burial and the husband and other family members discarded the house. Such deaths are considered unnatural and hence the mortal remains are left for decomposed itself inside the house. If someone die of accident like falling from tree, suicide, water grave, killed by wild beast or fire etc. such death are also considered unnatural and hence they are not given usual traditional community farewell at burial. Such deaths are attended by close relative and burial are perform only by senior male members of the village. But if somebody dies a natural death after prolong illness, old age etc. the entire village mourns the death and takes part in the burial process. Gaidinliu brought an end to this practice of discrimination and henceforth any death is considered natural and an act of Tingwang and deserved equal respect

Earlier, when any members of a family die, a cattle including Bison, buffalo etc are killed not only to fed people who visited and mourn the death but, it was also believe that, such cattle are taken away by the death soul with him/her. Gaidinliu however asked her followers to stop killing of cattle on the death of man but, to arrange minimal food for the villagers volunteer who arrange the burial and supported the aggrieved family. In the past, there was no burial ground in the villages hence the deaths are buried in the village itself. Gaidinliu also asked for a separate burial ground at the outskirt of the village. Now a days each and every villages have a burial ground called ‘Heraulua’.

**Adoption of child out of illegitimate courtship:** In olden days, if at any point of time a baby is born of illegitimate courtship; as it happen some times, the new born is sent to the parent of the male partner but, it is a taboo to allow such child to grow up in the society. The new born baby is therefore killed either by starving or strangulation. In the early years of her reformation mission Gaidinliu gave a clarion call to give equal opportunity to such unfortunate kids and stop killing of the new born. Thus she put an end to this evil practice of the society.
Women participation in religious activities and change in Mode of prayers: In olden days, all the village ritual and prayers are performed by Tingkupau only. At household level prayer are performed by father or other older male relative of the family. In case of sick sometime a diviner or healers are consulted, who performed his treatment by chanting mantras etc. There was no room for mass participation in rituals and prayers. There was no room for female participation in ritual process. Gender segregation was very much prominent in all religious activities.

In reform religion also the position of Tingkupau (Village priest) is still exclusively held by the male only. But in general there is no longer gender discrimination to a large extend. The Paime who are ranked second position in religious hierarchy of Heraka religion are represented equally by male and female. Heraka religious activities and prayers and accompanied by mass singing of devotional hymn in which all male, female, young and old take parts. Gender segregation of the pre-reform days are done away to a great extend in reform religions. However, the left and right doctrine is practices even in the reform religion. In all the mass gathering and even inside their temple, a sitting arrangement, the right sides are reserved for male counterpart. This is more significant in the context of Heraka believe. The right side is considered pious and dutiful. When they step into the Temple campus, the right leg first step in. In fact, in every movement or works, the right hand or leg initiate the move, which is considered an upright conduct.

The concept of life after death, rebirth and the abode of Tingwang: According to the pre-reform or Paupaise tradition, after the final separation ceremony the spirit of the death goes to another world called Heruimeram; the world of the death’s spirit or soul. There he/she would meet all the spirit or soul of the family who departed from the earthly world. As mentiond above, they also have the concept of rebirth.

The followers of reform religion also belief in these entire concept like Heruimeram, rebirth etc but, Heruimeram is now a temporary zone. The final destiny of the soul is decided at Heruimeram. One path from Heruimeram leads to the abode of Tingwang where all the spirit of good person stayed and the other path leads to the abode of sinner called Hemuimeram.
Figure 2 (Courtesy: Tingwang Hingde in Zeliangrong -1991)

The figure above described the concept of Hemuimeram i.e. the land of sinner and Tingwangki – the abode of Tingwang, and the land of the living i.e. the world.

A: The land of the living human i.e. world.

B: The dividing line of the living and death spirit. Once the spirit of a living being crossed the line B from A the mortal being is considered death and the spirit cannot come back to the mortal body.

1-8: The eight passage of the spirit until the final decision of his/her destiny is decided at the court of Jaumuangpeu who is entrusted by Tingwang to decide the fate of the spirit.

D: The court of Jumuangpeu.

F: Hemuimeram – the land of sinner.

E: The abode of Tingwang - the spirit of all good people reached here.

It is said that the path to Hemuimeram is broad in the beginning but narrowed down till the final destination, whereas the path to the abode of Tingwang is narrow in the beginning and as one move ahead it broaden till the final destination is reached. If one reached F, the life there will be full of miseries. Even if rebirth takes place, it will be a punishment in a poor family, or in the form of animal such as dogs etc. But if one reached the destiny E there will be happy and full of fun. If send for rebirth, it will be in a form of rewards. This way the cycle of rebirth continued
until one assumed the form of a dew that vanished with a drop. The concept of the court of Jumuangpeu and the difference between Tingwang abode and Hemuimeram i.e. the land of sinner, are an addition to the concept of death and spirit was not known the Paupaise.

**Introduction of some new practices in religion practices:** Apart from reformation of earlier practices, some new institutions and practices were also introduced after reformation:-

**Observation of Jalua (Full moon day):** Another drastic change and in fact a newly introduce practice was observation of Jalua (Full moon day). The practice of sun worshipped is antiques in North east, especially among the people of the Brahmaputra valley. Among the hills population sun worship is popular among the Apatani group in Arunachal Pradesh. The religion is call Donyi Polo. They considered the sun and moon as the physical manifestation of the God. The teaching of Gaidinliu about the fullmoon is also closely related to that of Donyi Polo cult. However it is too far to fetch any connection and influence of Donyi Polo and vice versa and tradition of Sun worship in ancient Assam with that of Gaidinliu and Heraka. Heraka religion have their own principle and philosophy behind observation of full moon day. According to Gaidinliu, the whole universe both living and non-living including the Sun and Moon are the creation of Tingwang. Tingwang respect and love his own creations so also should human being. Of all the creation of Tingwang, the Sun and the Moon are strongest. Human and other creation of Tingwang; both living and non-living should all respect them.

Secondly, human being commits mistakes knowingly and unknowingly which is natural. Therefore a day in a month should be kept aside for offering prayer to Tingwang to give us strength and seek forgiveness for all the misdeeds. The day the moon and the sun appear in full shaped is considered as the best occasion to offer prayer to Tingwang and also demonstrate our respect for the sun and moon.

Thirdly, according to Zeliangrong traditions, solar and lunar eclipse mostly occurred during full moon. Natural phenomenons like solar and lunar eclipse are considered as sign of bad forecast. Such day only brings misfortunes to men. Therefore, to avoids misfortunes and incidents people stay away from works on such occasions.

Therefore, as a mark of respect to the sun and moon, to pray Tingwang for good health and seek forgiveness for misdeeds and finally to avert misfortunes, she asked her people to observed every full moon day of the month. Initially people also used to offer animal or chick to Tingwang on such occasion. In the beginning before the construction Kelumki full moon day prayers are conducted at Paiki. A resolution to strictly observed the full moon day was also
passed by Zeliangrong Heraka Association during its 14th general Conference at Nrianam Village, Assam during the 15th and 16th January, 1987.

**Construction of Kelumki (Prayer Hall):** In earlier days, the Zeliangrong Naga do not have the tradition of temple. On most occasions, offering to various deities are executed at *Herateubebam*; an offering place, which are located at the outskirt of the village. Household prayer and sacrifices are performed at respective house. So, there was no concept of Temple. As cited above, even the full-moon day prayers are conducted at Paiki in the early days of reformation. It was 1983 during the Conference of Zeliangrong Heraka Association at Hekaukum Pungchi Village in Dima Hasao, Assam; at the instruction of Gaidinliu a resolution for construction of Kelumki (Prayer Hall) at each and every village of Heraka followers was taken. Today there is no such Heraka village which does not have a Kelumki (Prayer Hall).

**Steps for protection and promotions of traditional dress, dances, music and sports:** After the formation of Zeliangrong Heraka Association in 1974, the Association at the call of Gaidinliu regularly organized various competitions like traditional dances, music like flute, violin, drum etc. and sports like long jump, javelin throw, shot put etc every year during their Annual Conference. With a slogan of ‘Loss of religion is loss of culture and loss of culture is loss of identity’ Gaidinliu also works for the preservation, promotion and development of Zeliangrong traditional dresses, music, songs and sports along with her reformations. Pierce ear with rings; irrespective of gender, is one of the traditional practices of the Zeliangrong Nagas. But after conversion as people discarded traditional institutes, dress, songs and dances Gaidinliu asked her people to preserved their traditions and culture. As a marks to distinguished the followers of reform religions as well as traditional religions *Paupaise* group from the convert who has accepted Christian, a resolution was taken by Zeliangrong Heraka Association during its 15th Annual Conference at Mpuilo, Dima Hasao during 1st and 2nd February,1988 to compulsorily use traditional ‘ear ring’ by all the followers of reform religion.

Apart from encouraging traditional dances and music another idea of dance and music competition in the Annual Conference of Zeliangrong Heraka Association was to inculcate the spirit of unity and oneness among the three sub-groups, despite disparity in dialect. Therefore, a single dance form and song are pre-selected for the competition by the Association leaders.

**Formation of Paime – A Core group of Holy disciple:** Apart from refinement of religious practices, Gaidinliu also introduced some new institutions such as *Paime, Paiki, Kelo Deipeu* etc. to ensure strong foundation and better organization of reform religion. During the
formative years of reform movement, Jadonang and Gaidinliu form a core group of dedicated and pious youth as their torch bearer and named them as Paime. Although there is no discrimination among the followers of Heraka faith but core groups from among the village youth who are sincere, pious, morally straight and dedicated are selected as a core group by the village elders whose responsibility is to lead the villagers from the front in all auspicious occasion. These core groups; both male and female, of holy disciple are called Paime. The institution of Paime is continued even to this day. The Paime are next to Tingkupau in the religious hierarchy of Heraka religion. In case of female member, one can remain a member of Paime till her married if she remains pious and dedicated. Marriage is not a bar for male members but his conduct and discipline is accountable for his membership as Paime. They takes the lead in all religious matter where the participation of Tingkupau is not mandatory, like in the mass prayer at Kelumki, Paiki, during prayer for sick in households etc.

Paiki: Paiki is the place where the rendezvous of Paime are held. It is like the sanctum of Heraka villages. The host of Paiki is selected from among the household of the village. There is no such established norm to select the host of Paiki but a generous, discipline and religious couple are usually selected for the host of Paiki. All the important socio-religious issues of the village are discussed at Paiki. It also served as the guest house of religious preachers. The male head of the host family is called Paipeu and the female head is called Paipui.

Kelodeipeu: As in case of selection for the host of Paipeu, the responsibility of Kelodeipeu is given to a socially minded with leaning toward religious and overall welfare of Heraka society. As the name says, his duty is to acted as the mentor to the village youths and accompanied Paipeu and Paime in all social and religious activities of Heraka followers.

A big turning point in the history of Heraka religious reformation movement was the publication of Tingwang Hingde (in Zeme) in 1991. A religious text and the guidelines starting from religious philosophy, rites or practices, the prayer hymns to be accompanied on various occasions, and other numerous topics such as observation of various festivals, the rules and regulation of marriage, divorce, settlements of disputes etc are all enshrined in the said book. Another book of the same Title and of the same genre was published in 2007. These two books codified along with religious philosophy and principle, it also contains many aspects of customary law. Therefore a book published in a written form was another turning point in the history of religious and social reform movement under the leadership of Gaidinliu.
Conclusion: Above are some of the major reforms introduced by Gaidinliu and Jadonang. After the early arrest of Jadonang, Gaidinliu spend some more years with the Zeliangrong Nagas of N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) (N.C.Hills) and Peren district of Nagaland before her subsequent arrest. Majority of them in N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) and a considerable numbers of them in Peren district therefore adopted Gaidinliu reform measures in a bigger way. After her released from Jail, Gaidinliu was not allowed to go back to her native place for many years fearing the resurrection of her political movement. The Naga separatist movement probably creates this apprehension. It took several years for Indian government to realize the difference between Gaidinliu and separatist Nagas. Even before that, some of her faithful followers traced her and brought her back to their midst. She continued her reform measures till her last breadth. She named her reform religion as Heraka; literally meaning fence (hurdle) from smaller spirit i.e. free from smaller deities/spirit and hence pure. This religion is popular among the Zeliangrong Nagas in N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao), Zeliangrong and Liangmei in Peren district of Nagaland and among the Rongmei in small pocket of Manipur. The account of religious reform among the Zeliangrong Nagas has been described as a counter measures to foil the attempt of the Christian missionaries and was termed by F.S.Downs as ‘the only of its kind with no comparison in its anti Christian propaganda in North East India’. Downs made this reference while writing about the early works of American Baptist Missionaries in the hill area of Manipur in the early part of 20th century. But apart from an attempt to preserve and safeguard their tradition and culture there is no such evidence of anti-church propaganda. It is a unique event among the hill people of North East not only for reform measures but, because of the leads taken by a female leader to uplift a male dominated society hitherto unknown in the history of the region.

Notes and references

Primary Sources

(FROM THE OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF ZELIANGRONG HERAKA ASSOCIATION, NORTH EAST INDIA)


Interview
1. Interview Mihuibe Nriame on 23/02/2016. Age around 90 and a village priest of N.Pungua village, N.C.Hills, Assam. He had witnessed the religious transformation from Paupaise (Old tradition) to reform religion Heraka.
2. Interview with Haijerangbe Nriame on 13/09/2016 at his residence Longmang, Haflong, Assam. Age around 45 he is a direct convert to Christian from Paupaise.
3. Interview with Hegadaung Nriame, on 12.12.2016, Ex-Spy, Rani Party and Octogenarian at his residence at Hejaichak, Assam.
4. Interview Shri Kedihungbe Nriame on 17/02/2017 at his residence at N.Pungua, N.C.Hills, Assam. He is the Former Chairman of Zeliangrong Heraka Association, Assam.

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