

the ancient practice of hunting (the “bow” as tool/weapon) or from ritual activities connected with rain-calling (or both!), makes little difference in the final analysis. Current usage and opinion is the determining factor. In this respect the important revelation for Chewa people today is that the foreign deity *Yehova* (or *Yawe*) is really *Chauta*, the God they’ve always known and worshipped, and the God whom their ancestors also turned to for help in the day of trouble!

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TRANSLATION OF “GOD” AND “LORD” IN SOME NAGA BIBLES

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The Nagas are one of the small ethnic groups of North-East India, who also spread over into the north-western part of Myanmar. There are as many as 22 recognized Naga tribes forming a homogeneous group, within which each tribe maintains its own identity and has its own definite boundaries. Each tribe has its own separate language, and in many cases there are sub-tribes which speak different dialects. The Indian State of Nagaland is the home of the majority of Naga tribes.

Ever since the arrival of missionaries among the Nagas, Bible translation has gone on side by side with evangelism and church expansion. A gospel of Matthew was first translated into the Ao language in 1883, and the entire New Testament in that language was published in 1913. Since then Bible translation has gone on steadily, with the whole Bible now available in 6 Naga languages and the New Testament in 15. Translation projects are active in 11 languages.

For the purposes of this article I have selected the first three Naga Bibles to be published: the Ao Bible (1964), the Lotha (Kyong) Bible (1967), and the Angami Bible (1970). All three of these Bibles have followed the RSV and KJV English versions in their translation; and my enquiries reveal that the translators of these Bibles had little access to training or to the Handbooks and other helps which are now available. Their translation work was carried out in very difficult circumstances.

In this article I will investigate briefly the traditional concepts of the deities and spirits associated with the tribes and the tribal terms used to translate the term “God”. I will also try to discover the meaning of the terms chosen for the translation of “the LORD” (*YHWH*) in these Bibles.

Traditional terms for deities used in the three Bibles

The Ao Naga translators chose the term *Tsungrem* to translate “God”. Traditionally the Ao Nagas believe in a number of supernatural beings who are directly or indirectly involved in the wellbeing and happiness of the individual and the community. The term *tsungrem* refers to a class of

spirits who are in charge of the fields which the Ao people cultivate and are considered to be in full control of the village. *Tsungrem* is believed to be found in the immediate environment of the Ao tribe, such as their fields, villages, jungle, streams, trees, and huge boulders, wherever the tribe go about their daily activities. The health and prosperity of members of the tribe are believed to be tied up with the proper worship of this deity.

Before the arrival of Christianity the Ao Nagas never considered these *tsungrem* as supreme deities, even though a special day is observed on which ceremonies are performed in honour of all the *tsungrem*. On this special day in July animal sacrifices are also made to mark the celebration. Today Christians also observe this day, but as a kind of social festival without animal sacrifices. Among the *tsungrem* the chief is known as *Lichaba*, to whom the creation of this world is attributed. A special day is also observed with animal sacrifices to this deity.

In Bible translation the name *Lichaba* was not selected to translate the term "God", even though *Lichaba* is the chief *tsungrem* as well as the one responsible for the creation of the world. This was because the early translators realized that *Lichaba* has little or no connection with human affairs. The Ao belief is that all negative action in the area of natural phenomena directly points to the action of *Lichaba*: things like landslides, sickness, and plagues in the village.

There are other *tsungrem* such as *Kitsung tsungrem* who is believed to bring good fortune to its owner. Then also *Kimung* who directs the people of the village where a particular person should select the proper site for the construction of a family's house. *Amung tsungrem* are those beings that inhabit the blue sky; but they have no concern for people here below on earth, and therefore no sacrifice is performed to these spirits. Ao people believe that *Amung tsungrem* never come down to the country where the Ao live, though they may appear to other neighbouring tribes.

There is another class of spirits or beings whose characteristics are evil; they are called *Mojing*. The Ao belief is that anyone who encounters *Mojing* is sure to live a miserable life of poverty, and usually a short life as well. Ao Bible translators have used this term to translate "ghosts".

The Ao translators selected the term *Tsungrem* to translate the word "God" in the Bible in spite of its limited range of meaning. However today the Ao Christians have given a wider interpretation to the meaning of *Tsungrem* in their teaching and preaching, from the perspective of their understanding of "God" as revealed in the Scriptures. *Tsungrem* is now understood as the supreme being who is all powerful, the creator of heaven and earth and the one who is interested in the affairs of this world.

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Traditionally in the mind and thought of the Kyong (Lotha) people the concept of a supreme being is entirely lacking. The Kyongs have no belief in a supreme being who rewards the good and punishes evil. Whichever spirits or deities the Kyongs offer sacrifices to, this is only meant to keep

these spirits in good temper, because many of the deities or spirits the Kyongs worship are considered to be harmful.

In their animistic religion the Kyongs believe that *Potsow* are the spirits who live in a world of their own in the sky, and they affect only those earthly people who are directly below their sky. The *Potsow* are believed to look like men in appearance and they have attendants who serve them as servants. They also have a language of their own which can be understood by one of the clans among the Kyongs. *Potsow* are believed to visit the earth occasionally to hold conversation with the village seer in order to foretell the future of the people of the village. It is through the village seer's dreams and symbolic gestures that *Potsow* are said to communicate to the village people. The Kyongs believe to this day that a particular variety of rice seed was given to one village by *Potsow* through a village seer. Among the Kyongs worship is only offered to *Potsow* in sacrifices, though ceremonies of appeasement and sacrifices are offered to other lesser deities and spirits to gain their favour.

There are other deities who are not considered as important as *Potsow*, but who have played important roles in the life of the Kyong people. One of these is *Sityingo* who is considered as the Lord of the wild animals, the one who keeps wild animals as people keep pigs and cattle. Hunters usually offer sacrifices to *Sityingo* to obtain success in hunting. There is also *Okitsityingo* who is believed to be the guardian of houses and the village. Proper respect and offerings are given to him to keep him in good temper, which in turn brings prosperity to the house or village where he lives. The Kyongs believe that once *Okitsityingo* leaves the house or the village calamity surely follows.

Rangsi is the spirit or deity in charge of the crops. His special favour towards a family results in an abundant harvest of the crops, while his disfavour results in a poor harvest. *Tchhupfu* is another deity to whom sacrifices are offered, because he is the guardian of rivers and streams. The *Khuyuham* are those spirits who have carried away children missing in the jungle; yearly ceremonies and sacrifices are offered by the Kyongs to ward off their evil influence. Another set of spirits called *Tsandhramo* are solely responsible for all kinds of illness, sickness, and misfortune. They are invisible and they cause objects such as hair, bits of wood, or stones, to enter into the body of a person, resulting in sickness. Only the village seer can extract such objects from the body of the person affected.

Among all these terms, the early Kyong translators selected only two for use in the Bible. *Potsow* is used to translate the term "God" and *tsandhramo* to translate "evil (or unclean) spirit".

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The Angami Nagas have an altogether different, all-encompassing term *terhoma*, which refers to a class of deities who are believed to cause all natural phenomena such as earthquakes, eclipses, and landslides. The Angamis do not consider all *terhoma* to be malicious or harmful.

The chief of the *terhoma* is *Kepenopfu*, usually spoken of with the

possessive suffix as *Ukepenopfu*. The literal meaning of *Kepenopfu* is "birth spirit"; that is, one who is the creator of living beings and especially of the human race but not the creator of the universe. *Ukepenopfu* is considered to be the ancestress of man. The particle *-pfu* is a feminine termination and most Angamis admit that *Kepenopfu* is a female being. *Kepenopfu* is believed to inhabit the sky above, and the souls of those who have lived good lives go to live with *Kepenopfu*. *Kepenopfu* is never malicious to human beings but always exercises benevolent action towards people.

There are other *terhoma* such as *Rutzeh*, who is the evil one, the one who dispenses death – especially sudden and accidental death. On the other hand, *Mavemo* is the good *terhoma* responsible for the fertility of crops and animals. *Telepfu* is another female *terhoma*, a mischievous spirit who carries off men, women, and children, and hides them in caves and the hollow trunks of huge trees. She never kills her victims but renders them senseless, mad, and unconscious. *Tsukho* and *Dzurawii* are male and female spirits, husband and wife, who are in charge of the wild animals. Hunters pray and perform ceremonies to the couple to obtain good luck and success in hunting. *Ayepi* is the fairy *terhoma* who lives in houses and brings prosperity. *Ruopfu* is another female spirit combining the attributes of both guardian angel and familiar spirit or destiny.

From the beginning of Bible translation the term *Ukepenopfu* was used to translate "God", while the generic term *terhoma* was used for "Satan" or "Devil". The term *ruopfu* has been used consistently to translate every occurrence of "soul" in the New Testament and in the Psalms of the 1970 Angami Bible (Psa 103.1; 104.1 for instance).

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From this brief study I make the observation that the *terhoma* of the Angamis is very similar in meaning to *Potsow* of the Kyongs and *tsungrem* of the Aos – however the early Angami translators have made use of the generic term *terhoma* to translate "Satan" or "the Devil", whereas *Tsungrem* and *Potsow* are used by the other tribes as equivalents for "God". In the case of each language's equivalent for "God", translators have used what they considered to be the best term available and this has then been filled with the biblical or Christian teaching about God. In a way this has built a bridge between the old traditional religion and the new teaching of the Christian religion. As a result the Naga Christian, while using the traditional terms, can think of *Tsungrem* or *Potsow* or *Ukepenopfu* as the one who is all powerful, the creator of heaven and earth, and the constant guide and helper of people.

Translation of "LORD" (YHWH) in the three Bibles

This is an area where two of the Naga Bibles (Ao and Kyong) have used an equivalent for "LORD" in the Old Testament which comes from the way they have understood the term "Lord" (Greek *kurios*) in the New Testament. It appears that all three of the translations have done almost the same thing when they translate "Lord" in the New Testament: each

of them has used a term which is the equivalent of "lord", "master", or "owner". However there is a wide variation in the way in which translators have handled the "tetragrammaton" *YHWH* "LORD".

In the case of the Ao Bible, the translators have used *Kibuba*, meaning human master, teacher, owner of property such as a house or land, to translate "Lord" (both *kurios* in the New Testament and *adonai* in the Old Testament). For the tetragrammaton *YHWH* they simply used the capitalized form *KIBUBA* giving the same meaning as for "Lord". This pattern was followed consistently throughout the Ao Bible.

In the case of the Kyong Bible, both the term "Lord" and the name "LORD" in English Bibles were translated by the term *Opvui*. The meaning of *Opvui* is "owner", that is, the owner of a house, the owner of a field, the owner of cattle, and so on. Since there was no distinction made in either the form or the meaning of the translation *Opvui*, readers have understood that the *Opvui* Jesus ("Lord Jesus") is one and the same as the *Opvui* of the Old Testament. This has resulted in the interpretation that the Jesus of the New Testament was all along acting with the class name *Opvui* in Old Testament times, in the history and faith of the Israelites.

By contrast the Angami Nagas have consistently translated "Lord" (*kurios*) in the New Testament by *Niepu*, which means "master", "owner", "lord", "sir". The same term is used to translate "Lord" (*adonai*) in the Old Testament. But in every case where the form "LORD" (*YHWH*) occurs the Angamis have used *Jihova* to translate it.

The words *Kibuba*, *Opvui*, and *Niepu* all have the same root meaning, "owner". That is to say, every person is the master or owner of his own property; so when the term is applied to "God" then *Tsungrem* or *Potsow* or *Upekenopfu* is the owner of all creation. However *Kibuba* and *Opvui* are qualifying words or extensions of meaning which describe the deities, and the terms for the deities *Tsungrem* and *Potsow* are only generic terms; so native speakers of these languages would still look for the proper name of the deities to which the terms *Kibuba Tungsrem* and *Opvui Potsow* point.

In the context of the social and cultural settings of the Naga tribes, every object such as a stone, a tree, a mountain, a river, an animal or bird, needs to have, and does have, a proper name besides the class name to identify it. This is especially true with personal names. Behind every personal name lies the dignity, the prestige, and the importance of the person. And a person without a personal name has no place in the society of the tribe. Among the Kyong and Ao tribes, therefore, the readers of the Bible have inevitably borrowed the term *Yehowa* or *Jihova* as a proper name for God from their neighbours the Angamis, even though the name is not mentioned anywhere in their own Ao or Kyong Bibles. In the hymn books of these tribes *Yehowa* and *Jihova* are frequently found as the proper name of God. As a consequence of this borrowing, the Ao and Kyong tribes are using the name *Yehowa* or *Jihova* in prayer and preaching just as the Angamis do.

Thus for an ordinary Ao, the proper personal name of his *Tsungrem* is *Yehowa*, and for the Kyong the proper personal name of his *Potsow* is

Jihova. The readers of all these Naga Bibles understand *Kibuba*, *Opvui*, and *Niepu* as the extended meaning of their *Tsungrem*, *Potsow*, and *Ukepenopfu* respectively. To these readers the combination of the term for their deity and its extension gets little attention without the proper name.

There are Old Testament translation projects among other Naga tribes where the praise names “Almighty”, “Creator”, and “Everlasting” are used as substitutes for *YHWH* “LORD”, but the problem of the proper name comes back to these projects too, because of the long use of the name *Jihova* as the proper name for God in the churches.

In order to handle this difficulty, it may be necessary to transliterate *YHWH* as *Yehowa* or *Jihova* in certain passages:

- (1) where the meaning of the name *YHWH* is explained, (such as Exo 3.14-16)
- (2) where there is a reference to what God’s name actually is (Exo 15.3; 33.19; 34.5-6; 39.30; Deut 28.58; Psa 68.4; Isa 42.8; Jer 16.21; 33.2; Amos 9.5-6)
- (3) where *YHWH* “LORD” is distinguished from other names of God (Exo 6.3).

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WHAT IS HIS NAME? Translation of divine names in some major North Indian languages

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The major North Indian languages, all being derived from Sanskrit, share many common linguistic features and vocabulary. Almost all these languages use common religious terms to mean the same thing. This is helpful in Bible translation because one language can borrow terms which have been used in the Bible in another language. However care must be taken in using such borrowings, because the same term may have different shades of meaning in different languages.

In this article I will limit myself to four languages: Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, and Nepali. I include Nepali in North Indian languages because it is as much related to Sanskrit as the other three languages, and there are about three million Nepali speakers in North India. I have selected these four languages because the Bibles in them are immediately available to me.

The translation of “God” (*El, Elohim*)

There are three terms which can translate this divine name of the Bible. They are *Deva*, *Bhagwan*, and *Ishwar* or *Param-Ishwar*. All these names are Sanskrit terms and can be found in the Hindu scriptures. They are usually used as the titles of deities. *Ishwar* or *Param-Ishwar* is sometimes used as a personal name as well.

In the Hindu pantheon there are hundreds of gods and goddesses, and each divine being has his or her personal name; for example, “Ram”,