



## Impact of Christianity and Modern Education on the Bujuur Society

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### Abstract

*The Bujuur is one of the indigenous and Christianized tribes from the state of Manipur in India and Sagaing in Myanmar. Like all the Christianized tribes, the Bujuur also underwent a social transformation culminating in both positive and negative changes. The article explores and discusses the social discourses within the Bujuur as a result of Christianity and accompanying modern (western) education. The objective of the article is to present the nature of social changes within the Bujuur with regards to cultural and traditional sustainability, as well as to analyse the present state of the Bujuur if the underwent transformation liberated the society or has put them in a new social prison, with Christianity and modern education as the premises. Ethnographic method was used for the study with interviews, discussions and anecdotes of individuals with lived experiences as the main components. The study finds that the Christianity and modernity herald social changes and outlooks including reorganization of clan system, better literary and occupations and village administration, while at the A W12-same time the cultural heritage are at risk of being forgotten and there is identity quandary within the society over the tribe's nomenclature. It is concluded that Christianity and Modern Education failed the Bujuur society in preserving their pre-Christian cultural heritage, traditions and knowledge, and there is a need to re-look and re-assess the society's future pathways in order to cultivate a sustainable space wherein Christianity, modern education and cultural heritage co-exist.*

**Keywords:** Bujuur tribe; Christianity; Modern Education; Cultural heritage; Identity

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### Introduction

The Bujuur is a small ethno-linguistic tribe with a population of about 2,600. They are also known as Moyon and one of the constituent tribes of the larger Naga group. The Bujuur inhabits Chandel and Tengnoupal Districts of Manipur in India

and Sagaing Region in Myanmar. The village is the socio-political unit of the Bujuur society. Altogether, the Bujuur inhabits 18 villages namely- Kapaam (Komlathabi), Penaching, Heigrutampak, Khukthar, Matung, Rashankhur, Laarphuw, Khungjuur, Chumthar, Thangkin, Sinadaam,

Khuringkhaw, Khurfhuwdaam, Kurkam, Bujuur Khuwfhaw, Mengkaang and Nanpulun. Of them, 6 villages namely Kapaam (Komlathabi), Penaching, Khungjuur (Khongjon), Matung (Mittong) Kurkam and Bujuur Khuwfhaw (Moyon Khullen) are census villages, 1 village (Nanpulun) is located in Myanmar and another 1 village (Mengkaang) was previously a census village located near the Indo-Myanmar border but uninhabited following the Naga-Kuki ethnic conflicts of the 1990s: the village is presently located within the Kapaam village as a satellite and refugee camp.

The Bujuur society structured within the clan system with levels of clan- Primary and Secondary. The Primary clan consists of two clans- Shimpuhw and Ziingven. Secondary clan consists of 12 clans- Nguruw, Laanglom, Charii, Bungjeer, Sherbum, Suwnglip, Nungchim, Chineer, Ruwen, Vaanglaar Khaartu and Hungam, divided amongst the two primary clans (Chara, 2022, p.20). The existence of primary and secondary clan, although sometimes interpreted as Moiety system by Shangkhaw (1995, p.446) and Nungchim (2015, p.35), is because of the changing clan interpretations, clan structure and reorganizations affecting the kinship systems and its meanings. For instance, the secondary clans Nguruw and Charii were actually-traditionally sub-clans of the clan Shimpuhw; as a “Shimpuhw, they descended from a common ancestor by the name Vangruwng whose name was invoked during rituals for Shimpuhw individual” (Ringhow, 1998, p.42-43,61,64; Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2008, p.65) and thus historically regarded as one clan. However,

at present, the clans (Shimpuhw and Ziingven) are not given due importance and the sub-clans have taken over the clans, giving rise to Primary Clans (the original two clans) and Secondary Clans (previously sub-clans but presently regarded as a clan). The clan system dominates and defines the socio-political institution including village council/village authority, festivals, marriage and land holding system (Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2008).

Traditionally, the Bujuur society followed a syncretic belief system blending monotheism and shamanism. They believed in the supreme creator and omnipotent being known as Thangnang, though the figure was never worshipped (Shangkhaw, 1995, p.454). The social belief system was dominated by superstitions and taboos alongside the existence of spirits, known as omlae, who were believed to cause sickness. The uniqueness of Bujuur rites and rituals was that the spirits were not worshipped; the rituals and rites were mere appeasements or negotiations with the spirits so that the spirits would leave the humans alone. As the spiritual realm of the Bujuur society was mainly restricted to the duties and responsibilities of the shamans (Ithiim) and priests (Khurfhuw) and the knowledge a secret, the society as a whole had not much idea or involved in the spiritual institutions other than following the instructions of the ithiim and khurfhuw when required.

Presently, the Bujuur are adherents of Christianity with Baptist and Roman Catholicism as the two main denominations. Christianity was introduced to the Bujuur in the year 1922 with the Baptist missionaries

as the pioneers. Roman Catholicism entered in the year 1955. The traditional Bujuur belief system continued to survive for few more decades till the conversion of the last practitioner to Christianity in the year 1971. At present, all the Bujuur are Christians and the Church plays significant role in the socio-political institutions. Christianity came hand in hand with Modern (Western Education), both were very significant in the transformation of the Bujuur's social, economic, cultural and political systems. Some of the changes were positive ushering education and social development, while at the same time with negative consequences like cultural dispossession, identity quandary and extreme xenophile. This transformative trend is not restricted to the Bujuur but rather very common phenomena among the Christianized indigenous tribal peoples across the world. Some of the Christianized groups began to realize the negative impacts and starting to take practical actions to address the cultural issues, while some (including the Bujuur) have not yet identify the effects mainly because of the over dominance of Christianity and modernity on the social psychology.

This article aims to analyse the Bujuur experiences of Christianity and Modern Education and discuss the positive and negative impacts they have on the socio-polity. The main objectives of the article are,

- i. To assess the impacts of Christianity on Bujuur cultural identity
- ii. To review the role of Modern Education in the Bujuur society

The article is composed based on ethnographic studies among the Bujuur community with interviews, anecdotes and discussions as the primary methods for information collection. Local documents including personal diaries and organisational publications were also closely studied. Personal experiences also played significant role to analyse the social transformations, to identify social-cultural gaps, issues and challenges and to comprehend the social psychology on religion and modernity.

### **Coming of Christianity and Modern Education among the Bujuur**

Bujuur's exposure to Christianity and modern education were parallel, similar to the experiences of other tribes in the state of Manipur, India. Considering the simultaneous experiences, Bujuur social narrations usually mixed up the history of modern education with Christianity as the events and individuals involved were almost the same. Whereas Bujuur's exposure to modern education started in the year 1910 (Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2009, p.32) and Christianity entering in 1922, Christianity significantly changed the Bujuur educational experiences and outlooks to a different level with educational and evangelical works going hand in hand.

According to local records, the Bujuur first experienced Western Education in the year 1910 with three individuals attending a mission school located at Ukhrul. Thereafter, interested individuals also started sending their children to study in mission schools located in Ukhrul, Kangpokpi, Kakching and Moiramghom in Imphal. From the year 1923, students returning from

mission schools started teaching the village children by using their houses as makeshift schools. With the initiatives of the village elders of Khungjuur village, a government lower primary school was opened at Khungjuur village in the year 1932 (Moyon, 1998, p.14; Ringhow, 1998, p.46). Initially, only young boys were allowed to attend school while young girls were prohibited. The prohibition ended after interested young girls were noticed secretly meeting in forests to read books; following the incident, the village allowed young girls to attend school (Personal Communication, 2020). Following the footsteps of Khungjuur, more schools were also opened in other villages namely Matung and Nungtheeng. Nungtheeng village was renowned in the 1930s and 40s as a centre for education and Christian mission works (Serbum, 2012, p.32-33). Sensing the need for education, several schools were opened at every opportunity in every Bujuur village after the World War II. The society began to prioritize education (especially Western education) ushering migrations to educational centres where their children could access one. The literacy rate of the Bujuur stands at 84% according to the 2011 Census making them one of the most literate tribes in the state of Manipur (India. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, p. 178).

Bujuur's experiences with Christian missions were in two phases. The first phase began in the year 1922 with Baptist mission and the second phase began in the year 1955 with the arrival of Roman Catholic mission. The early exposure to Christianity started in the year 1910 when Bujuur children went to study in mission schools. The first conversion and adoption of Christianity

began in the year 1922 (Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2009, p.32; Moyon Naga Baptist Association, 2001, p.1). Initially, the conversions were at personal level and rate of conversion was slow and restricted only to students (and their close ones) of mission schools. The mass conversion and visibility of Christianity in the Bujuur social space started in the year 1929 when the Christian pioneers returned to Khungjuur village for evangelisation (Serbum, 2012, p.26; Serbum, 2012, p.16). The years from 1929 to 1931 were characterised by social turmoil in almost every Bujuur villages with conflicts between newly converted Christians (mostly youngsters) and the traditionalists. One of the main reasons of such conflicts was the open denouncement of the Bujuur traditional ways of lives, customs, practices and festivals by the Bujuur Christians (Chara, 2021a, p.7). Harassments on Bujuur Christians were common and the Christians also responded with social and cultural boycotts. The Christians, specially of Nungtheeng village, also established schools giving rise to the culture of prioritising modern education among the Bujuur, which is in fact one of the greatest contributions made by Christianity on the Bujuur society.

The second phase of Christianity was related to Roman Catholicism, which was received with mixed responses. 1955 marked the year Bujuur adopted Roman Catholicism (Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2009, p.33) and the year 1956 with a major mission work in Bujuur villages. Roman Catholicism was welcomed in Mutung villages and in Khungjuur-Riidaangkhuw village by the traditionalists (who till then had refused to convert to

Christianity), but was strongly opposed by the existing Christians who were following the Baptist denomination. Like the conflicts in the first phase of Christianity, the second phase also witnessed conflicts between the Roman Catholics and Baptists. Fuelled by the inter-denominational conflicts, inter-religious conflicts, post-Independence developmental challenges and Indo-Naga conflicts, there were series of migrations from villages like Khungjuur, Matung, Nungtheeng and Bujuur Khuwfhaw to the villages located in the valleys for better livelihood and educational opportunities.

Christianity and Modern Education went hand in hand among the Bujuur because they were inseparable. Whereas the first Christian converts were the pioneers of education among the Bujuur, the later converts to Roman Catholicism shaped the educational perspective to a different level with the focus towards higher education at the level of university. It can be thus concluded that without Christianity, Modern Education would not be able to be successful among the Bujuur and vice versa. The need to read the Bible, sing hymns and engage in mission works were the initial driving factors for education, while at the later stage, educational objectives changed to career (to get job specially teaching positions that were in great demand) and research oriented.

One of the many legacies left by Christianity and modern education on the Bujuur society was the official adoption of the exonym 'Moyon' as their identity, formalised with the formation of Moyon Union in the year 1937. Thereafter, the term Moyon slowly replaced Bujuur in almost all spheres for

many decades; the usage of Bujuur reappeared and became popular from the early 2000s following cultural and identity revisionism. Christianity and Modern Education also contributed to development of modern Bujuur literature and writing system. The Bujuur adopted Roman Script for writing paving way to new art and literary discourses including love songs, Christian hymns and poems. The Bible and hymns were also translated to Bujuur language with the aim to promote and preserve Bujuur language.

### **Social Changes**

It would not be an exaggeration to state that no other factors had previously influenced and changed the Bujuur throughout the history the same way Christianity and modern education transformed the Bujuur. Within a span of hundred years, the Bujuur society completely underwent paradigm shift with regards to lifestyle, society, economy, politics, geography and outlooks. Christianity replaced the aged old belief systems and modern education replaced the oral traditions; the two cultural replacements further initiated waves of migrations from traditional villages to newly built villages most of which are located in the valley. The migrations to the valley villages were due to factors like previous social boycotts against Christians during initial phases of Christianity and access of better educational and economic-occupational facilities. The migrations to villages located outside the traditional territories were regarded as liberation; thus, people were not keen to continue observing pre-Christian traditions. Perhaps, it was the exposure to newer and

potentially better ideas that came with Christianity and Modern Education that culminated the people to seek for changes for the betterment of the society.

The Bujuur society gave emphasis to modern education with the objective for positive social, political and economic development. Since the year 1932 when the first school was established in Khungjuur village, education was considered the social necessity and many villages started to have schools; among them, Nungtheeng and Kapaam villages are worth mentioning. Nungtheeng village was a hamlet of Khungjuur and populated by Christians. The village was renowned as education centre from the 1930s to the late 1950s. Kapaam (Komlathabi) is a post 1945 village in the valley founded by migrants from Khungjuur village. The village hosts many educational institutes from primary to college level. Even though the Bujuur population is small, the society understands the need for modern education; accordingly, educational institutes are the primary social investments built via local initiatives and donations. It not only improved the literacy rate of the tribe but also pushes the tribe to experiment with newer ideas and ways of life based on the concept of modernity as ascribed within Western Education.

One of the earliest changes was in aspect of gender and related spaces like marriage and social visibility. Prior to Christianization, the Bujuur society was an isolated society with little or no interaction with the neighbouring tribes, whom the Bujuur considered to be lower in status than them. Accordingly, inter-tribe marriage was rare,

socially discouraged and Bujuur women were especially prohibited to marry outside the tribe (Chara, 2022, p.27). The inter-tribal and inter-community relationship between Bujuur and other tribes began to flourish following Christianization (Chara, 2021b. P.298); one of the first initiatives was the doing away of traditional taboos and prohibitions associated with inter-tribal marriages. The freedom to marry outside the tribe left a significant legacy on the Bujuur society with the majority of the present Bujuur population with a least one of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents belonging to other tribes. The easing of marriage with other tribes also improved the Bujuur demography; previously, the prohibition of marriage with other tribes had rendered the Bujuur gene pool to become stagnant with almost everyone related to everyone via webs of lineage such that even clan exogamy (between the two primary clans Shimpuw and Ziingven) came with lots of restrictions. Inter-tribe marriage also contributed to the disappearance of previous traditions and customs like the Imah-Itu (residence of husbands' at their wives' house) as most of the tribes to which Bujuur women married into were patrilocal and patriarchal (Chara, 2022,p.32).

Another significant impact of Christianity and modern education was the reorganization of the Bujuur kinship system. Prior to reorganization, the Bujuur society consisted of only two clans and twelve sub-clans (including three extinct sub-clans) with marriage within the same clan considered as a taboo. "Reorganization was deemed necessary at the period to address marriage issues as many people felt the two clan

system and clan exogamy posed restrictions to marriage” (Shangkham, 1995, p.446) within the same tribe especially with already interconnected familial ties wherein distant-cousin marriages were also discouraged even if they belonged to different clans. Accordingly, the twelve sub-clans assumed the status of clan giving rise to two levels of clans- Primary (ceremonial purpose and original clans) and Secondary (the twelve previous sub-clans) as well as the reorganization of the secondary clans into moieties within the primary clan. The Shimpuw clan was reorganized in the year 1950 and the Ziingven clan was reorganized in the year 1978 (Shangkham 1995, p.446; Chara, 2019, p.81-82). Accordingly, the Bujuur kinship structure is as follows,

#### 1. Shimpuw

##### i. Nguruw and Laanglom

ii. Charii and Sherbum, with Bungjeer and Suwnglip (both extinct)

#### 2. Ziingven

##### i. Nungchim and Chineer

ii. Ruwen, Vaanglar and Khaartu, with Hungam (extinct)” (Chara, 2021b, p.298; Chara, 2022,p.20)

The Bujuur polity also underwent change. “The traditional village polity was the village council known as Khuwpuh-Chiipuh” (Shangkham, 1995) and village general assembly consisting of elders known as Itar with knowledge of customs and traditions. The introduction and enforcement of Manipur (Village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act of 1957 put an end to the

institution of village council (Chara, 2019, p.83); the village authority is now the present administrative polity of Bujuur villages. Village authority in Bujuur villages was first adopted in Christian villages and later the trend was extended to traditional villages. Education also furthered the political shifting as the educated individuals who were also church leaders of the period were automatically inducted to a village authority. For many decades, and till the early 2000s, to become a member of village authority, individuals were required to serve in the Church as deacons for a period of time. The 2010s mark the separation of the Church and village authority in most Bujuur villages; so, presently, serving in the church is no more pre-requisite to become a member of village authority.

Christianity and western education assisted in fostering stronger kinship ties and bonds amongst the Bujuur villages including the sense of oneness. Accordingly, many tribe level organizations were formed on the principles of Christian teachings and modern philosophies to promote and safeguard the Bujuur culture. The Moyon Union was formed in the year 1937, followed by the Moyon Women’s Organization in the year 1940 and Moyon Naga Students’ Union in the year 1957.

### **Issues with Social Transformations**

The paradigm shift in the social culture of the Bujuur following Christianity and Western Education is not free of issues and limitations. Even though the Bujuur society as a whole progressed in many fields, the traditional Bujuur ecology and heritage was

forgotten, if not left to dissipate into memory and history.

The foremost social issue was identified by the traditional Bujuur who opposed Christianity fearing it would erode the Bujuur identity and traditions. Nevertheless, Christianity became popular amongst the people. One of the first actions the Christian converts initiated was to distance from the traditions and customs which they believed were pagan and uncivilized (Chara, 2021a, p.8). Many started to question and challenge existing customs, while some rebelled against the existing norms. Such challenges and social rebel were one of the many reasons for the reorganization of the hundreds of years old clan system. The Christians were not fond of the traditional clan system and taboos against endogamy; many opined that they no longer ought to obey the outdated taboo against clan endogamy as long as they don't belong to the same sub-clan. Thus, the Shimphuw and Ziingven clans were reorganized into two moieties (Shangkham, 1995,p.446) each and their constituent sub-clans were promoted to the position of clan. Accordingly, the traditional two clans (Shimphuw and Ziingven) were reduced to phratry, while any existing social and historical myths, totems and symbolism relating to the original clan system were dissolved in favour of the new narrations that would portray the sub-clans as legitimate clans.

The second impact on Bujur society was in socio-cultural space including festivals and rituals. Christian festivals quickly replaced traditional festivals (Shangkham, 1995). Age old festivals like feasts of merit were no

longer celebrated, if not prohibited. The non-observance of traditional festivals and cultural events resulted in mass unawareness of cultural heritage (Chara, 2021a). Folk songs, folk dances, folklores and folk music were ignored and prohibited; the present generation is paying the price of the prohibitions as many of them are not aware of the rich cultural heritage. The overemphasis on western education forced the students to ignore traditional knowledge learning spaces like bed time stories and peer discussions. Almost all the traditional arts, designs and patterns that defined the Bujuur got replaced by modified and modern versions.

As a result of the mass' lack of knowledge of Bujuur heritage, many cultural items were unconsciously destroyed in the guise of development projects. Khungjuur village in the hills was famous for many ancient sites like Koreen Thaen (Koreen graves) and Ruthakung (Place of monoliths); unfortunately, the graves were desecrated and many of the standing monoliths were destroyed to build bigger and better roads (Chara, 2021a). By the time people realized the importance of such places, it was too late as they were already destroyed. In addition to that, much against the custom prohibiting selling or transfer of Bujuur land to other tribes (Bujuur Aanchung Puh, 2008, p.8) few Bujuur leaders secretly gave away some portions of lands to other tribes in the name of Christian brotherhood, love and charity. The unfortunate giving away or secret selling of lands in the past denies the present Bujuur generations of any suitable land for sustenance. Mengkaang is one such village where the elders secretly sold away the land



located near the Indo-Myanmar border taking advantage of the Kuki-Naga ethnic conflicts of the 1990s; the displaced people of Mengkaang had no land to settle after the conflict subsided and were forced to live as refugees ever since. Many Bujuur youths felt cheated by the older generations for leaving nothing for them; they lamented that they instead inherit inter-tribal issues relating to territorial disputes with other tribes over the arbitrary decisions and land donations made by the elders.

Even though Christianity managed to foster inter-tribal relations between Bujuur and their neighbours, it however failed to attend to the Bujuur intra-relationships simultaneously. The Bujuur are adherents of two Christian denominations- Baptist and Roman Catholicism. As a result of denominational and doctrinal differences, the adherents of the respective denominations failed to get along. It has been observed that inter-denominational marriage is a big issue not only in terms of sectarian differences but in gender spaces as well. The reinforcement of patriarchy in Bujuur society as a result of religious doctrines means that women were expected to adopt/convert to their husbands' denominations, rendering women to be at the receiving ends of religion induced patriarchal expectations. Bujuur women have no choice but to follow the Church and society's mandates. They were also expected to uphold the sanctity of marriage by denying divorces in events of domestic and other related marital violence (Chara, 2021b, p.298-299). The denomination misunderstandings also led to land related conflicts between two constituent villages of

Khungjuur by the name Khungjuur-Riidaangkhuw (populated by Catholics) and Khungjuur-Khumin (populated by Baptists), which ended in the depopulation of Khungjuur-Riidaangkhuw in the 1960s as almost all the Catholics left the village as refugees after they were threatened by the Baptists (Personal communication, 2020). Similarly, in Kapaam village, the Catholics were not allowed to have their own Church building till the year 1997, while some other villages populated by the Baptists would not welcome any Catholics to their villages or induct any Catholics to the village authority.

The discontinuance of marriage restrictions means that many Bujuur are inter-marrying with other tribes. Although this is considered a sign of progress, it also resulted in subtle dilution of the customs and traditions. Many non-Bujuur women who married into the Bujuur tribe unfortunately brought their patriarchy along with them; this resulted in them questioning without prior knowledge of certain women-centric Bujuur customs like Imah-Itu and children of Bujuur women (and non-Bujuur father) identifying as Bujuur. The ultimate result is the society ultimately becoming, as pointed out by Chara (2022, p.32-33), uncomfortable with the mentioned customs with statements denying such customs were ever practiced by the ancestors of Bujuur or women should follow their husbands after marriage.

Western education has its own fare share of negative impacts on the Bujuur society. The interpretation of western education as the route to civilization and modernity is the root cause. The extreme promotion of western education among the Bujuur

improved the literacy rate, socio-economic status, employment and the like, but it also affected the social psychology and decision makings of the society. The social consensus on the importance and focus of western education rendered them to forget the traditional learning spaces. Oral traditions, folk tales, ethno-histories, Bujuur arts and crafts are at the verge of being forgotten as the society pays little attention to them. The stereotypic representations of tribals and manual labours in school textbooks pushed the younger generations to distance themselves from the Bujuur cultural ecology and traditional occupations which they are indirectly indoctrinated to believe as uncivilized. In addition, many parents push their children to study hard in order to be employed in public sectors so that they may live a luxurious life unlike their poor parents negatively affects the younger generations' interactions with their cultural heritage (Chara, 2021a). Bujuur parents rarely encourage their children to take part in cultural events; the continuous non-exposure to such traditional spaces means that the younger generations are completely aloof to customs and traditions. The aloofness has gone extreme in the recent years with the younger generations' statements like "customs and traditions are only for the old" and "we are now modern, so we don't need to obey customs and traditions". It is also disheartening to hear the younger generations taking pride over their lack of knowledge on cultural heritage. It has also been encountered that parents were also encouraging their children to speak in English which they believe is a sign of education and progress. Many Bujuur

children are not taught to communicate in Bujuur chong (Moyon language), which resulted in some children hesitant or shy to speak Bujuur chong even if they know.

The most striking impact of Christianity and western education on the Bujuur society is the paradigm shift in the identity and nomenclature. The term 'Bujuur' is interpreted as backward and pre-Christian by many who instead promote the adoption and usage of Moyon in all spheres of life including social, political and official spaces. The social idea is that Moyon signifies a modern and Christianized people (Chara, 2021a). Few elders recounted that when they were young, they were made to believe that 'Bujuur means uncivilized while Moyon means civilized'. For decades, the society tried very hard to distance themselves from 'Bujuur', which was demonstrated in the formation of Moyon Union in 1937. Although the intention of the Moyon Union was nothing malicious, it somehow promoted the idea of Moyoness by ignoring the word 'Bujuur'. In fact, for many decades, Moyon Union strove to protect and promote Moyon culture. Even though it was a matter of semantics, it had a detrimental effect on the way cultural heritage and identity are interpreted and understood. The term 'Moyon' was further pushed to be used as the last name by the leaders with the objective to promote 'Moyon'. This resulted in many Bujuur using 'Moyon' as their last name in official documents. The overemphasis on the term 'Moyon' is not without criticism especially from the culturally conscious individuals. As of now, the Bujuur society is divided between pro-Moyon and pro-Bujuur, each

with their own reasons on which nomenclature should be used (Chara, 2018, p.43).

### **Concluding Discussions**

It can be said that the Bujuur's experience with Christianity and western education is not a one-way progress; it goes hand in hand with cultural destruction. From a very broad perspective of human development, it can be stated that the Bujuur society progressed a lot because the two institutions transformed the erstwhile tribal and backward Bujuur society into a modern, literate and civilized society. However, the haste to modernization shields the Bujuur away from its self and cultural heritage thereby denying the people appreciate their self. The notions of self shame associated with being a tribal left a deep mark on the social psychology of the Bujuur that it is not easy to erase such misconceptions. Indeed, changes are necessary and part of human evolution, but rapid social transformation of the Bujuur within a span of few decades can be put forward as a classic example of hasted development at the cost of cultural traditions. It is essential for a group to engage in balanced progress so as to culture a sustainable space whereby the inherited identity and cultural heritages are safeguarded, promoted and appreciated equally vis-à-vis embracing development and change.

The Bujuur have progressed a lot and they took pride in such progress without comprehensive analysis if the path to progress they chose was effective, sustainable or understanding of them. The objective interpretation of Christianity and

western education as the new dawns of light, rays of hope and saviour by the Bujuur is also something that needs to be questioned by the people (Chara, 2021a, p.16). Christianity and western education did not directly push the Bujuur to move away from its traditional environment, but they are deemed responsible for their roles in influencing the social attitudes and social decisions. The initial importance given to western education by Bujuur Christians via establishment of mission schools unfortunately disappeared at present. The last mission school known as MYNBA School serving educational needs of the poor Bujuur people living near the Indo-Myanmar border was closed in the year 1996. Since then, there have been no church based or sponsored schools among the Bujuur. Instead, the church focuses more on Sunday schools for children's spiritual education. Many youths also lamented that the church may publish hymns and bible in Bujuur language but the church also did nothing to teach the Bujuur how to read or write in Bujuur.

When Christianity arrived among the Bujuur, the traditionalists were wary that the new faith resulted in cultural self alienation amongst the newly converts. It is unfortunate that these wariness and concerns of the traditionalists are dismissed by the present highly Christianized Bujuur who are on the firm belief that Christianity delivered them from the sins of paganism and would not accept any critiques on Christianity and post-Christian Bujuur society. Similarly, the benefits from western education, which also goes hand in hand with Christianity, disables the Bujuur to critique any cultural

consequences as a result of the over emphasis on western education and textbook knowledge. There are initiatives from social organizations like the Bujuur Aanchung Puh (Moyon Naga Council), Bujuur Shanuw Ruwrkheh and Thiimzih Teen Bujuur Ruwrkheh to protect and promote Bujuur cultural heritage through cultural events; but these initiatives are still at nascent stage due to lack of funding opportunities and intellectual bankruptcy to manage the programmes. For example, even though the Bujuur Aanchung Puh encourages every Bujuur to be literate in Bujuur language, there has been no attempt till date to educate the people (especially the younger generations) on Bujuur phonetics and writing system. Interestingly, almost all the Bujuur know how to read and write in Bujuur, but their literacy is self- taught based on the phonetics of the English language and literature.

Despite the Bujuur portraying itself as Christianized and modern society, there are many traditional customs that continue to be observed and at cases strongly defended by the society. Some of them are as follows:

1. Women are not allowed to become political leaders, and thus prohibited from becoming a member of village council/village authority (Serbum, 2018, p.178; Chara, 2019, p.87; Chara, 2021b, p.300-301),
2. Unmarried men are denied political rights, and thus prohibited from becoming a member of village council/authority (Chara, 2019, p.87),
3. Women are not allowed to host feast of merits like Ikam (Feast of wealth), Lashum Bathen (Feast of donation) and Thuir Iphin (Feast of achievement) which the society still believes are only for men,
4. The culture of men (bride price) in marriages, as though women are exchangeable commodities worth an animal or a metal,
5. Denial of women from inheriting ancestral properties (Nungchim, 2015, p.41),
6. The existence of unscientific traditional taboos to be observed by women (Serbum, 2018, p.179),
7. Gerontocracy whereby elders are the political figures, regardless of whether they are knowledgeable of age old customs or not. This system denies younger generations and women to political participation, representation and decision making (Chara, 2019), and
8. Denial of youths and children to take part in/observe traditional ceremonies including traditional engagements and marriage with dismissive statement “these are not for children”.

The above points demonstrated that the society selectively chose what they believe is appropriate for them as long as it benefits them. If certain Christian practices are considered good and patronized by influential people, the society accepts it; the same is true for traditional practices including taboos and prohibitions which continue to be observed whenever necessary and on demand by the society. In a similar argument, the society and leaders also

endorse the usage of Moyon as individuals' last name because they believe it would benefit the society through promotion of the name 'Moyon', but at the cost of the name 'Bujuur'. The denying of political rights and right to host feast of merits by women is also another demonstration how the society, despite claiming to be modern still invokes the already discarded and condemned pre-Christian traditions to deny women of their desires. And lastly, the social attitude against children with the statement 'these are not for children' alienates the younger generations from customs and traditions; without participation or observation, the younger generation cannot be expected to be aware of, appreciate and acknowledge the beauties of cultural heritage. The interesting observation is that, whereas the society dismissingly denies children to observe or participate in certain cultural practices, the society whines at the same time that the younger generations are not interested to learn about the disappearing Bujuur customs and traditions.

### Notes

- i. This is based on the year of the baptism of (L) Vangdaar Roel, as written on the headstone. Pre-Christian Bujuur belief system is a sensitive topic of discussion among the Bujuur; the general attitude against pre-Christianity and the non-converts is negative and dismissive, thus it is difficult to get exhaustive information on it. Whereas many claimed that all the Bujuur converted to Christianity by 1956, some elders however did not agree to the statement of complete conversion saying that many elderly persons, especially those involved in Ithiim (shaman) refused to convert and the mentioned (L) Vangdaar was one of them.
- ii. Some sources claim the date as early as 1896 as stated by the Speaker, Bujuur Aanchung Puh on February 8, 2022 (Kapaam village), while Moyon (1998, p. 61) put as 1914; however, the year 1910 is used in this article and based on the available local records of Bujuur Aanchung Puh (2009).
- iii. Based on personal communications (2021) and anecdotes of elders who were baptised in the year 1956.
- iv. Interestingly, there is a folk saying with the following line, "Lamsuw-Lamthae ymmoh nave, suwmthar ae ing aen laar va (if Lamsuw-Lamthae is lost, it is the younger generations' fault)", advising the younger generations to safeguard the ancestral lands and it would be their fault if those lands are lost. The younger generations felt that such folk sayings scapegoat the innocent younger generations who had nothing to do with any arbitrary decisions made by the elders when they gave away or sold the ancestral lands to other communities who also fought amongst themselves over ownership. Lamsuw-Lamthae topic emerged again in the year 2019 when two villages, namely Challong (of Lamkang tribe) and Vomku (of Anal tribe), engaged in inter-village conflict over the ownership of that land (Takhellambam, 2019).
- v. In February 2021, during the Bujuur Aanchung Puh assembly, the Moyon Literature Committee submitted a proposal

that every Bujuur should add 'Moyon' to their last name.

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