Chapter VIII

The researcher has undertaken this study of the traditional religion of the Thadou Kukis for two reasons, viz, to learn from the traditional religion and worship, and to bring out important elements in this traditional religion to enable the younger generation to dig deeper into the minds of this religion.

The exact year in which this religion was practised cannot be known to modern man due to the absence of written records and documents. Since time immemorial, until the 19th century, Thadous have practised their traditional religion. However, with the beginning of the 20th century they have turned away from this religion and accepted the Christian religion in place of their traditional religion. According to the census of 1971, there were Christians 53820; Hindus 77; and followers of traditional religion 6058 out of the total Thadou Kuki population of 59,955. At present, the number of Thadous who adhered to this traditional religion has been estimated to be below one percent of the existing population. The practice of this religion is on the verge of extinction. Within a short span of less than a century, the entire tribe has left this religion and accepted the Christian faith as their religion. Though it is somewhat difficult to understand, the reason is not far to seek.

223 Khaikhotinthang Kipgen opcit p. 119.
The researcher has already discussed the concept of God as it is found in different major religions of the world. People of the world believe in God or gods in different ways and in different contexts. The way they understand or the way they try to realize God or gods are different from one nation to another or from one country to another. For instance, India has more than a billion people. Majorities of Indians are Hindus by faith. Pakistan is an Islamic country. Our neighbour, Myanmar is a Budhist country. In spite of their differences in nationality, religion and the way they worship god, they all have a religion of their own to profess.

*Thadous*, like the people of other religions, followed their own religion for many years. They too worshipped God and offered sacrifices to appease the anger of god and the lesser gods or spirits. They too, practised all kinds of rites and rituals, marking each stage with an important event. The worship of God, religious rites and rituals are important from birth to death. Like many tribes of India and other parts of the world, they had fear for the spirits, who are believed to be present in all places. When we compare their religious worldview with that of other religions of the world, there are many similarities. They have shared the same idea of God with the *Chin-Kuki -Mizo* group of people. Many of them have turned away from thier traditional religion and accepted the new religion introduced by Christian missionaries.

Thadous, although they have left this religion, have retained some of religious beliefs such as the idea of a high God or *Chung Pathen*, who
is believed to be above all gods or spirits. After accepting the Christian view of God, they have a new understanding of God or Pathen. In the new religion, in Christianity, the idea of spirit, especially the role of the Holy Spirit is highly emphasized to a great extent to show that it is distinct from spirits or the lesser god. Each believer is expected to possess this spirit of God. So, the idea of God or Pathen and spirit are not new to Thadous when they accept the Christian religion. The idea of human weakness or sin was not totally absent even in their traditional religion. They offered a fowl to God or better known as ahkangtha or Hun, which is an act of worship to the almighty God. This is simply called ahkangtha because they offered a white cock to God. A good and spotless white cock is used as an offering to God. They are not allowed to break the bones of the cock thus killed for worship. The Jews too, have this kind of offering which is called the Passover, which celebrated the freeing of the Hebrews from their captivity in Egypt. The angel of Death killed the first born in of the Egyptians but passed over the Hebrews homes. The Jewish name for this is Pesach, celebrated on the 14th of Nisan. Many tribals of NorthEast India say that this sacrifice has some similarity with that of the Jew’s pass over feast. They claim that they are the lost tribes of Israel, namely Manasseh. Many Kukis have gone to Israel and settled there as Jews. But for others, who accept the Christian religion, it helps them to understand the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; whose birth, death and resurrection or his coming was predicted in the Old Testament.

Thadous, even before the advent of Christianity to Manipur and to other areas, have entertained belief in life after death. They killed animals,
enemies and performed all kinds of rites or ritual in order to get a good and secure place in the next life. Christianity also gives importance to the future life, though it exhorts its adherents to live good lives towards God and their neighbours. Jesus says to his disciples: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.” So many of the elements Thadous had when they were following their traditional religion have greater meaning when they accepted the Christian religion. To many Thadous, who had already left their traditional religion, it was like a schoolmaster giving a good training for a better and higher education. But there are some people who even after accepting the new religion, could not really adjust or understand the new religion but also hesitate to go back to the old one. When this kind of people, who are hovering between the old and the new religion fell ill or have some health problem, they usually go back to their traditional priests and asked them to heal them of their diseases or help them to solve their problems.

In addition to this, many could not really get rid of the old ways and beliefs, so they are still greatly influenced by the traditional religions. The researcher would encourage young scholars to dig deeper into this traditional religion and trace out the grip and influence of this outdated, but important religion on the life of the people who once adhered to it.

224 Matthew 22: 37-39
It should also be noted that Thadous have changed the old ways with new ideas. For instances, *Lompi*, which was once very important, has become very important again. But the way it has been used and its importance may not be the same as before. Now *lompi* is known as *Kuki Khanglai Lompi (KKL)*. It is actively involve in philanthrophic works among the Kuki people. They are doing commendable jobs which religious organisations or youth clubs cannot do. Chiefs are still known as chiefs. *Som* or dormitory has been discontinued. Many of the worldviews have also been changed. But all these changes are different from person to person. Many of the traditional forms of worship have been discarded and are taken to be obsolete. *Kut* or *Chavangkut*, which was an important festival has been revised or revived. It has been modernized for entertainment and socialization. Beauty contest, fashion show, etc. are added while retaining the cultural shows and other traditional forms of celebration.

All living religions of the world have undergone certain changes when it comes in contact with other religions and cultures. But the traditional religion of Thadous has no chance to develop or change its outlook. It has no chance to absorb other elements found in other world religions. It appears to us that in the traditional religion, no other religious experience was possible for its adherents. Whereas in other religions, many are emphasising the mystical aspects of religion. This religion of Thadous was full of fears; fears of some unseen and unknown spirits, who are said to live in hills, springs of water, rivers, lakes, cliffs or precipices and in dense forests where they move and carry on their activities. Fears of
any kind are the enemy of mental and spiritual happiness. So, in their
customary religion, the Thadous could not satisfy their yearning for God,
to whom they can share and lay bare their anxieties and sorrows. Though
they held that God was kind and good, the fear of the unseen spirits
haunted their minds, and instead of worshipping and relying on God, they
felt that their greatest need was to get rid of the spirits by appeasing their
anger by offering animal, through the incantation of their village priests,
who acted as priests and in many cases as medicine men or sometimes as
a witch doctor, whose area of specialization is to repel the evil eye of
spirits through offerings and sacrifices.

The reason for this change of religion may be very serious and
genuine for Thadous. No religious experience in the true sense was
possible. The traditional faith was full of the fear of demons and unseen
spirits, who were believed to be, present everywhere. In other words, the
aspirations and hopes of the adherents could not be met by this religion.
The religion wants more sacrifices than could be offered. It was the search
for comfort and peace of mind of freedom from the fear of unseen spirits
that helped the Thadous to change their religion. In addition to this,
education introduced by the missionaries. Thadous were suspicious about
this education in the beginning. Many did not like to avail themselves of
the opportunity to study though it was given to them free of cost. But after
some time, they realized the value of education. They started sending
their children to schools when they were aware of the need for education.
They started learning the three R’s: Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.
Education was introduced to man and woman who learnt the art of reading
and writing. This is the reason why many people in the villages can read and write these days. Classes for the adults are nowadays held at night. Education has changed the people to see things better than before. It is education that has opened the eyes of Thadous to see and chose things for their future.

Looking back to the past, it is good for Thadous to learn from the past tradition, which is lost now. Respect for parents, keeping morality, hard work and the need to help the needy ones- widows and orphans are traditional values. Though education has changed and freed mankind from unreasonable fears, it does teach them to love and traditional value of love and respect for their parents. All religions, including Christianity teach love and respect for parents and elderly people. Paul says, “Children, obey you parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother; which is the first commandment with a promise- that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Thadou young people need to look back and learn from their past tradition where in their parents respected their own parents and elderly people of the community. Modern youth have neglected this important ethical code. The freedom of education brings to the individual should not be taken to mean the freedom to do whatever one wants to do. It may be said without hesitation that the Thadous had a rich cultural heritage. They adhered strictly to the moral codes and religious values. They were more obedient to their parents, more sincere in their works, chaster and more

225 Ephesians 6: 1-3.
concerned about moral codes and religious values than modern youngsters. Learning the good things from the past is not a sin, but a blessing. Though head hunting has stopped, it is very doubtful that the young people have a real sense of value. If they have embraced the Christian faith, they should be true to the new faith and live by its principles and teachings to show that important transformation has taken place in their lives. Hence, they should serve God and their fellow human beings sincerely. The welfare of Thadou Kukis lies in adhering to traditional values of honesty, straightforwardness, sense of care for parents and for the weak, spirit of unity and co-operation among themselves. In addition to becoming true followers of the Christian faith, the Thadous Kukis belonging to the younger generation should imbibe the traditional moral values for the moral re-generation of the Thadou Kuki society and for the preservation the cultural heritage of the Thadou Kukis.