

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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1. Introduction

North East India (NEI) consists of eight states and they are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. NEI account more than 7.7% of the total geographical area of the country and has more than 3.88% of the total population of India. These people consist of more than 200 schedule tribes. The land is mostly mountainous and hilly though there are plateaus and valleys in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur.¹ NEI is closely border with Bangladesh in the South, in the North Bhutan and Myanmar in the East. The people of this region are considered by many scholars and social scientist as sociable and hospitable people.² The ethnic composition of the race of this region is extremely complex. Majority of the inhabitants of the population are of Mongoloid race.³ It is difficult to ascertain how many languages are being spoken in this region and this has created diversity of culture and historical assessment to ascertain the cultural history of the various groups become more complex.⁴

2. The Political Scenario

Till 13th century North East India was not much known to the world in term of today's understanding of North East India. The people lived in their own world without much interference from the outside world as well among themselves as such. However, there were occasional feud between the hilly race and the plain inhabitants. But those occurrences were solved with their own law of the land. By 1230 AD Ahoms⁵ began to plunder this region and gradually controlled Assam especially the Brahmaputra Valley by the end 13th century. Chu Kapha was the first Ahoms Raja of Assam. They subsequently assimilated the earlier inhabitants⁶ and their cultures.

¹Cf. J. Puthenpurakal, *Impact of Christianity on North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996), xiii. (Hereafter cited as Puthenpurakal, *Impact of Christianity*).

²Cf. Verrier Elwin, *The Tribal World of Verrier Elvin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 226-228.

³Many scholars assumed that they might have migrated to this region during the last three or four thousand years, though there is no agreement among them concerning the precise origins.

⁴Cf. Frederick S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Vol. V, Part 5 (Bangalore: CHAI, 1992), 1-3. (Hereafter cited as Downs, *History of Christianity*). Some scholars argue that major languages spoken in these regions were fifty to hundred and fifty minor languages.

⁵The Ahoms, a Shan tribe from central Asia who were of Tebeto-Burman race.

⁶Here earlier inhabitants refer to the descendents from Aryan race who might had migrated to this part of the world during the Aryan civilization.

However, during the 18th century their ruling began to decline due to internal crisis within the power of successions⁷ as well as attack from outsiders.⁸ In 1790 Ahom king Gaurinath Singh requested the Britishers to help him to solve this political conflicts within his territory and in 1792 the British sent captain Welsh to Ahom territory. However, the British maintain the policy of non-interference to the internal affairs of the Ahoms. Captain and his troops were called back to Kolcutta.⁹ At the same time internal crisis further increased and the Burmese seeing the situation took the advantage and controlled Ahom kingdom. Skirmishes with the British on the borders of Bengal contributed to the first Anglo-Burman war of 1824-1826. The British after getting victory signed the 'Treaty of Yandabo'¹⁰ which removed the dominance of Burma in this region. The Raja of Manipur and Ahom to upper Assam were initially restored, only to be gradually annexed with the British Empire in India.¹¹ Assam came under the complete control in 1826, Cachar in 1832, Naga Hills in 1877, Lushai Hills 1892, and Eastern Frontier Tracts and some other regions in 1898. Thus the whole region came under the British administration.

As time passes by with India independent in 1947 15th August, in 1947, Assam became States of India, Arunachal became the 24th states of India Union on 20th February 1987; Manipur became full fledged State of Indian Union on the 21st January 1972, Mizoram was instituted on 20th February, 1987 as one of the States of India; Nagaland was constituted as the 16th State of India on December 1st 1963; Tripura was organized as the State of India Union 1972; and very recently Sikkim was constituted as the 22nd State of India on 16th May 1975 and was included as the 8th sisters states of North-East India on 2002. Today politically North-East India have central parties as well as local people's parties. Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh, are rule as of today by Indian National Congress, Sikkim rule by Sikkim Democratic Front, Nagaland rule by Naga People Front, Tripura rule by Left Front (CPM and CPI). Today Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya the politics is dominated by Christians. Christianity has grown in number, after independence. It is among the Hills people, Christian movement has taken momentum.

3. Christianity and the North East India

With the Treaty of Yandabo between The British and Burma on 24 February 1826 introduced a different scenario for the people of North East. With this Treaty and the subsequent extension of

⁷Internal crisis is referring to the appearance of the rebellion group within the Ahoms.

⁸Outsider refers to Burmese as well as the hilly tribes who occasionally come down to rob the plains and lawless robbers from Bengal.

⁹Cf. Ernest W. Talibuddin, *An Introduction to the History of the Anglican Church in North East India (1841-1970)* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), 26. (Hereafter cited as Talibuddin, *Anglican Church*).

¹⁰Treaty of Yandabo Text "His Majesty the King of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interferences with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea (now Jaintia). With regard to Munnipore (now Manipur), it is stipulated that, should Gumbheer Sing desire to return to that country, he shall be recognized by the King of Ava as Rajah." Cf. Manilal Bose, *Historical and Constitutional Documents of North-Eastern India (1824-1973)* (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), 61. (Hereafter cited as Bose, *North-Eastern India*).

¹¹Cf. Bose, *North-Eastern India*, 63.

the British administration toward NEI brought the entire area under control of one government and exposed the region to the outside world.¹² Thus, the History of Christian activities in NEI was also accompanied with this administration. The introduction of Christianity in the North East India was in a very denominational structure of the western Christianity. This open the field with so many names like; Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, and now the charismatic groups and independent Churches. The early Christian missions that work in India were based in England, Wales, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Italy. Hence this has given the space for the critics to say that “Christianity is a foreign religion resulting suspicion and strong opposition against Christian activities.”¹³ The majority of the Christian in NEI come from tribal milieu. Therefore, many historian and social scientist categorized this tribal Christian as illiterate, heathen, barbarian, and so on. It was true that they were not educated as the invaders of these regions but the tribals were also well educated in their own life setting and background which was considered as the best method of survival. Hence, in order to understand the development of History of Christianity in NEI one need understand the important of their life background without imposing and looking negatively toward the life and witness of this people. North East India today has little more than 16.5% of Indian Christians.

4. Different Christian Mission in NEI

4.1. Roman Catholic Mission

The earliest Christian contacts with NEI were made by the Roman Catholic missionaries in the 17th and the 18th centuries.¹⁴ It is belief that these Roman Catholics missionaries¹⁵ were looking route to Tibet or the interior of China. Some are opines that they were visiting Christian community associated with the Moghul garrison at Rangamati in Lower Assam.¹⁶ For unknown reasons this community had disappeared by the 19th century.¹⁷

The Catholics revived their work when in 1850 Assam was attached to the Vecariate Apostolic of Lhasa. However, signifies missionary work only began after 1889, when the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan, and Manipur was created and entrusted to a young German order,

¹²Cf. B.B. Goswami, “The Tribes of Assam: A Few Comments on Their Social and Cultural Ties with the Non-Tribes”, *Tribal Situation* ed., Suresh K. Singh (Shimla: 1972), 273.

¹³John Oving, he Church Union Movement in North East India with Special Reference to the Response of the Kyon (Lotha) Baptist Churches from 1963-1988” (M.Th. Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 1989), 17.

¹⁴Cf. C.B. Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 267. (Hereafter cited as Firth, *Church History*). See also F.S. Downs, “Rangamati: A Christian Community in North East India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, *ICHR* XII. 2 (Dec, 1978), 88. David Syemlieh, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Nagaland* (Nagaland: n.p., 1990), 35-36.

¹⁵It was told about this Lower Assam Christian that in 1854 S.M. Whiting met a very intelligent young Miri who told him that he had served for three months with Roman Catholic missionaries working in the hills among the Adis. After that the priests were ordered to leave by the people who said that the Miri was free to remain they did not want any sahibs living in their country. The priests then passed over into Tibet.

¹⁶Cf. F.S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God* (Guwahati: CLC, 1971), ii. (Hereafter cited as Downs, *The Mighty Works*).

¹⁷Badashill Roman Catholic Christianity did not evangelize the local and thus remained isolated and outside the mainstream of Christian movement in the region. Cf. Firth, *Church History*, 267.

the Salvatorian Fathers. Roman Catholics became active once again in 1921, when the Pope had entrusted the work to Salesians of Don Bosco. They worked in Shillong and Garo hills in 1933. By the beginning of the Second World War Catholics have increased from 5,000 to 50,000. Today Catholics had established their center in all the North East States. Even they had reached to the remotest places of whole NEI with their social services such as educational systems and church mission.

4.2. Serampore Mission¹⁸

The first protestant missionary to preach the Gospel in NEI was an Indian Christian of the Baptist denomination, by name Krishna Pal who was sent by the Serampore Mission. He preached for several months at Pandua at the foot of the Khasis Hills. He also converted seven persons and baptized them.¹⁹ Her working for eight months Krishna Pal went back to Serampore without starting a regular work or mission centre in that area.

In 1819 the Serampore Mission though without establishing regular mission works translated New Testament Bible into Assamese and full Bible 1833.²⁰ In 1824 they also published Bengali script New Testament for Khasi-Jaintia people as they were not having their own alphabet during those days.²¹ Both the translations (Assamese and Bengali Script for Jaintias) the languages were difficult and not so useful for the later missionaries but this provided them something to start with.

In 1829 at the request of Commissioner, David Scot the Serampore Mission and Baptist Missionary Society started a center at Guwahati. James Rea²² was sent to Guwahati for the mission. He started a school at Guwahati, in the Brahmaputra Valley with assistance from Serampore. 12 students were enrolled in the school three Khasis and nine Garos. However, no record of such is available whether this people had become Christian or not. After some years of labour in 1836 Rev. James Rea baptized six persons and a church was organized with 12 members.²³ As F.S. Downs has pointed out “none of the Indian members of this first church in the Brahmaputra valley remained faithful”.²⁴

With the resignation of the assistant and returning to Serampore the first church in Brahmaputra valley developed serious crisis. This crisis was more aggravated with the death of Rev Rea's

¹⁸Serampore Mission was established the Baptist Missionary Society of England but they operated independently since 1816 till 1838.

¹⁹ Out of seven converts two khasis namely U. Duwan and U. Anna, one Assamese and other four identities were not known. Cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 11.

²⁰Cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 11

²¹Cf. O.L. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change in North East India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993), 66. (Hereafter cited as Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*).

²²James Rea originally came to India as East India Company officer. But after coming to India he experienced a religious experience which compelled him to join Serampore College for Theological Studies and was the first Serampore graduate to serve in the North East India.

²³12 members were inclusive of the six converts, the missionary, wife and some local British officers.

²⁴Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 12.

wife. In spite of new missionary William Robinson's arrival the church almost died within a year as some of its members were suspended for immorality and others left Christianity. By 1837, when Bronson visited Guwahati there were no local Christians left in the church. Rev. Rea and Robinson left the mission with disappointment and joined the government service. Thus, in 1838 the BMS donated both the Guwahati and Cherrapunji mission fields to the American Baptist.²⁵

4.3. Baptist Mission

4.3.1. Plain Assam

In 1835 British commissioner, Francis Jenkins extended invitation to the American Baptists Union²⁶ working in Burma to come to the NEI to undertake a mission work among the Khamti and Singpho tribes.²⁷ But the American Baptist Mission sent the first missionaries to NEI not for the Khamti and Singphos but for the purpose to reach China and to evangelize the Shan tribes while they make NEI as strategy place for their China and Shan tribe's Mission. The two missionary couples who came to Sandiia on 23rd May 1836 were Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Brown and Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Cutter. On 17th July, they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Miles Bronson and Mrs. Jacob Thomas.²⁸ Thus, Downs has rightly pointed out that for "five years the missionaries working in Assam were identified as workers in the Shan Mission."²⁹

The Home Board and the Missionaries with the hope of Shan Mission began to work among the Assamese. By the end of 1837 Mr. Brown had mastered the Assamese language and in 1838 he began to translate the Gospel of Matthew. By 1836 the field missionaries felt that they cannot have both the Shan Mission and a Brahmaputra Valley Mission. Therefore, in 1841 they turned to fully concentrate on Brahmaputra Valley Mission. The first Assamese convert took place in 1841 by name Nidhiram. In 1845 at the missionary meeting the first church in Assam was organized at Sibsagar and later at Nagoan and Guwahati respectively.³⁰

The first educational institution in Assam was established at Nagoan as they opened the orphanage which served both as an orphanage and school. The orphanage was the source of numbers of converts and those converts became very important for the Assam Christianity in the later years. Though the progress of the missionary works was not so fruitful however after almost twenty five years of mission work in Assam there were 54 members in the three churches, i.e. Sibsagar, Nagoan and Guwahati.³¹ The missionaries who were working in Assam plain felt that

²⁵Cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 12-13.

²⁶Later it was changed to American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.

²⁷Cf. Cf. Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission in Nagaland* (Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1984), 50. (Hereafter cited as Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission*).

²⁸In 1838 the Bronson Family, together with Mrs. Thomas moved to Jaipur at the suggestion of Mr. C.A. Bruce, a British Officer, to organize work there for the Singphos and preparing way for Shan mission evangelization.

²⁹Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 14.

³⁰ Cf. Downs, *History of Christianity*, 70. See also cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 13.

³¹Cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 13.

the success of Christian mission may not happen among the Assamese people as the result was very slow, thus their attention turned towards the hilly people of the region.³² However, inspite of the slow growth of Christianity in Assam the mission continued their work in Assam. Today Assam Baptist Convention has six Associations,³³ 555 churches and baptized members 32103.³⁴

4.3.2. Baptist among the Karbis

In the late 1850s the American Baptist began their works among the Karbi tribe. It was not successful as the people were so much influenced from Hinduism. However, they continued their work not of regular basis but the bordering areas of Assam Valleys. The Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention was formed in 1980 and now they have 13 Associations with 311 churches and 28697 baptized members.³⁵

4.3.3. Baptist in Garo Hills

In 1860's the American Baptists also began to work among the Garos.³⁶ A School was started by Political officer among the Garos at Goalpara in 1847. Though the school didn't last for very long but the first two converts of the Garos namely Omed and Ramkhe of Watrepara village, and baptized in 1863.³⁷ They were from this school. Ramkhe started a school at Damra and Omed establish Rajasimla as the first Christian village among the Garos. In 1867, 15th April Omed was ordained as the first NEI minister and Rajasimla Christians were organized as church. Within a year the numbers of beliver increased to 150 and by 1875 there were 400 members of the church. The American Baptist Mission (ABM) started a center at Goalpara and in 1877 at Tura which became the largest ABM station in Assam. In 1875 the Garo churches were organized into an association and which had first meeting in Goalpara.³⁸ By 1900, the Christian community grew to be 10,000. Today the Garos have 10 associations and two centers (Puksora Centre and

³²This conviction was mainly based on the experiences of their colleagues in Burma where the tribal Karens were becoming Christian in large numbers. Moreover, their contact with the Nagas of Namsang Village of Arunachal Pradesh of present Tirap District was found to be more friendly and open in interaction with the missionaries.

³³They are UBCA, KABS, NDBA, MABA, SBA and SDBA.

³⁴*The Annual Report of the General Secretary, Assam Baptist Convention presented at the 62nd CBCNEI AGM* (Hamrem: Town Baptist Church, 27th – 29th April, 2012), 3.

³⁵*The Annual Report of the General Secretary, Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention presented at the 62nd CBCNEI AGM* (Hamrem: Town Baptist Church, 27th – 29th April, 2012), 1.

³⁶In 1837 Jenkins had asked the American Baptist to open a school for Garo Boys at Goalpara, but they had declined on the grounds that this was far distant from their chosen field of labour in upper Assam and, furthermore, would contribute in no way to their primary objectives of working their way across the mountains into Upper Burma and China.

³⁷Cf. F.S. Downs, "Origin of Christianity in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya," *ICHR*, Vol. 1 (June, 1972): 1-3.

³⁸Cf. Downs, *History of Christianity*, 79-80.

Shillong Centre) which also organized as associations. The total baptized members of Garo Baptist Convention as per the reports of 2012 is 259,330.³⁹

4.3.4. Baptist in the Nagas Hills

The Baptists Missionaries (Mr. and Mrs Miles Bronson and Mrs. Jacob Thomas) who came to Jaipur of Assam to work among the Singphos came into contact with the Nagas who were living in Namsang Village just above the Jaipur outpost and presently under the Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, Mr. Nathan Brown one of the Missionaries in Sandiya requested the Home Board in America for a Missionary to work among the Nagas.⁴⁰ In reply to the request in 1839 on 22nd July Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus Barker were appointed as the missionaries to the Nagas. They reached Jaipur on 14th May 1840. Prior to their arrival Mr. Bronson made few time visits to the Nagas and was allowed to stay in Namsang Village. In 1840 Mr. and Mrs. Bronson with his sister Rhoda Bronson began their work in Namsang Village. However, their work among the Nagas was cut short with the concept that it was not worth all the trouble in comparison with the possible harvest among the Assamese. Thus, in 1841 the Naga mission was abandoned.⁴¹

The interest of Baptist Mission among the Nagas started again by Edward Winter Clark, his wife Mary Mead Clark and Godhula Rufus Brown an Assamese in the early 1870s. Mr. Clark asked Mr. Godhula his Assamese in 1871 to learn some of the Naga dialect in order to see the possibility of entering into Naga Hills. By 1872 Godhula visited five times to Naga village of Deka Haimong and his wife joining the last visit. They brought nine Nagas to Sibsagor which were baptized by Clark at the Dikho River. On their return the converts built a chapel in their village. Thus the first Church in Nagaland came into being in December 1872.⁴² Soon after that Clark also visited Deka Haimong⁴³ and on 22nd December 1872⁴⁴ he baptized another 15 Nagas.⁴⁵ In 1876 Clark also moved to stay in the Naga Hills, at first Molungyimjen (Haimong), later shifted to newly formed village of Molungyinsin where the first mission was started in North East India outside government station.⁴⁶ Later in 1894, the Mission center was transferred to Impur, which was regarded as Missionary colony and it's headquarter of Ao Baptist Church Association till today.

³⁹Cf. "Report of the Regional Secretary of the Garo Baptist Convention" Presented at the Annual Meeting of CBCNEI held at Hamren Town Baptist Church, Karbi Anglong from April 27-29, 2012, 58.

⁴⁰Cf. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission*, 50.

⁴¹Cf. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission*, 50-53. Mr. Brown in his letter to the Board advised not send any missionaries to the Nagas till more missionaries were added in Assam. Due to this reason for another forty years no mission work was taken seriously among the Nagas.

⁴²Cf. Downs, *The Might Works*, 65.

⁴³Present Molungyimchen or Molungkimong.

⁴⁴P.T. Philip gives this date as 11th November 1872 P.T. Philip, *The Growth of Baptist Churches in Nagaland* (Guwahati: CLC, 1976), 55. (Hereafter cited as Philip, *Baptist Churches in Nagaland*). Whereas, F.S. Downs considers 11th December 1872 as the actual date of baptism. Cf. Downs, *The Might Works*, 65.

⁴⁵Cf. Philip, *Baptist Churches in Nagaland*, 55. They were registered as members of the Sibsagor Church for the time being, since there was no Church in the Naga Hills.

⁴⁶"A Glimpse of Nagaland Churches," *Nagaland Celebrates Quasqui Centennial* (Kohima, Nagaland: NBCC, 1997): 14.

In 1878 Rev. C.D. King was appointed to work in Naga Hills and established a mission station at Kohima and founded a Kohima Baptist Church in Angami areas.⁴⁷ The first Angami Naga, named Eurasian was baptized on June 21, 1885.⁴⁸ Gradually, with the contribution of W.E. Witter and family, the Mission work was expanded to a third center in Nagaland for the work among the Lotha Nagas at Wokha in 1885.⁴⁹ They opened a school for children enrolled of 14 boys. Later, the untiring missionary labor of E.W. Clark, the first converts from the Lotha tribe were two young men, Nkhao and Shanrio, who were baptized by Haggard at Impur on 2nd Oct. 1898.⁵⁰ Historically speaking, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council was organised in 1935 at Kohima as the Naga Hills Baptist Church Advisory Board and it was renamed as the Naga Hills Baptist Church Council in 1937. But the Nagaland Baptist Church Council as such was reorganised only in 1953 and then functioned as a true organization, though somewhat provisional until 1960, under a constitution laid down to guide its working. Incidentally, at first the name was Naga Baptist Church Council and only after the inauguration of Nagaland as a separate State a consequential amendment was made, and then it was regularized as Nagaland Baptist Church Council as it is used today. There was even some discussion about changing it to an appropriate name, but the action of the Council meeting at Kohima on March 28-31, 1958 affirmed, ‘the name of the Council should remain as it is’ (NBCC Action No.8), except for the slight change of ‘Naga’ to ‘Nagaland’ at a later stage. The NBCC is a constituent member body of the CBCNEI, and also maintain historical relationship with American Baptist Missions. According to 2012 statistic report, NBCC consisted of 20 Associations with 1454 Churches and 5,15,384 and four Associate members.⁵¹

4.3.5. Baptist in Manipur

Before the outbreak of the Anglo-Manipur war in 1891, William Pettigrew had already arrived in Bengal the previous year. He came to India under the sponsorship of private society, the Arthington Aborigine Mission.⁵² He was a member of the Church of England. But after coming to India he was re-baptised⁵³ from R. Wright Hay a missionary living in Dacca.⁵⁴ In 1891 he came to Cachar, Assam. He developed an interest in the Manipuris he met in Cachar but

⁴⁷Cf. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission*, 96-97.

⁴⁸Cf. S.W. Rivenburg, “Historical Sketch of the Angami Naga Mission,” *The Assam Mission of the ABMU*, (December, 1886): 87.

⁴⁹Cf. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Mission*, 101-102.

⁵⁰Cf. Downs, *The Mighty Works*, 126.

⁵¹Cf. “Report of the General Secretary of Nagaland Baptist Church Council for the year 2011” Presented at the Annual Meeting of CBCNEI held at Hamren Town Baptist Church, Karbi Anglong from April 27-29, 2012, 6.

⁵² This mission was an organisation sustained largely by one Mr. Robert Arthington, an English gentleman of the Society of Friends. He was a great giver to missions, his contribution being always for pioneer works, with instructions that only two workers to a place, learn the language, give the gospel to the people, then move on to other fields, not tarrying to perpetuate their work.

⁵³ Church of England practices infant baptism. After coming to India, he became convinced the need for believer’s baptism, and accordingly received. However, he remained an Anglican continued serving under the Arthington Mission till he joined with the American Baptist at Sibsagar in 1895.

⁵⁴ Dacca during the British regime was in India. After Indian independence it became part of East Pakistan. In 1971 Bangladesh became a sovereign state and now Dacca is the capital of Bangladesh.

could not enter Manipur until the acting political agent gave him permission to open a school at Imphal in 1894.⁵⁵ While he was staying in Silchar in Cachar he learned Bangalese and Manipuri.⁵⁶ He was taught Manipuri and Bangalese by one Janmajoy Singh who afterwards acted also as translator of Pettigrew's Mitei Lon-gi Vyakaran, Part II.⁵⁷ Within the short span of three years he not only mastered the Manipuri, but had reduced it into writing. In 1893 he had printed two books in Manipuri on the elementary Catechism of Christianity and a comparative study of Lord Krishna with Jesus Christ. Both the books were published while he was in Silchar.⁵⁸

In 1892, 12th September Mr. Dalmas, Secretary of New Zealand Baptist Missionary, and the Aborigine Mission asked for a permission to start Missionary work in Manipur to the political agent Major Maxwell⁵⁹ but he turned down their request and suggested them to work among the Cachar Manipuris.⁶⁰

Having failed to obtain permission W. Pettigrew again requested to Mr. A. Porteous, the officiating political agent in Manipur as Maxwell had taken leave.⁶¹ Porteous allowed the missionary without the knowledge of the higher authorities of Assam. Although objections followed, the missionary being a British nationality undoubtedly served him well, for no American would have been given permission to enter Manipur by the political agent for any other reason.⁶²

Pettigrew arrived at Imphal on 6th February of 1894 to start his school.⁶³ Initially he gave private tuition for the children of government officials.⁶⁴ Within a short time the first Manipuri boys school was opened at Sinjamei Imphal, naming Pettigrew Lower Primary School,⁶⁵ now upgraded to Junior High School. Major Maxwell, when returned from leave told Pettigrew that he must discontinue his work in Imphal.⁶⁶ He however, suggested the missionary to work in the

⁵⁵ F. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India* Vol. 5 (Bangalore: CHAI, 1992), 84. Hereafter cited as Downs, *History of Christianity in India*.

⁵⁶ T. Luikhan, ed., *History of the Manipur Christian* (Ukhrul: NECA, 1948), 10. (Hereafter cited as Luikhan, *Manipur Christian*).

⁵⁷ Manipuri Grammar prescribed for students of the upper primary schools of the state.

⁵⁸ Cf. K. M. Singh, *History of Christian Missions in Manipur and other Neighbouring States* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), 56-57. (Hereafter cited as Singh, *History of Christian Missions*).

⁵⁹ Singh, *History of Christian Mission*, 57

⁶⁰ Dairy Maxwell, Political Agent and Superintendent of the state, No. 52, dated 12th September, 1892.

⁶¹ Singh, *History of Christian Mission*, 58. Porteous was on friendly terms with Pettigrew who succeeded in impressing the officiating political agent to grant him permission for entry into the state and start a school in the capital Imphal.

⁶² Singh, *History of Christian Mission*, 58

⁶³ Cf. Singh, *History of Christian Mission*, 64

⁶⁴ Downs, *Mighty Works*, 76

⁶⁵ Johnah M. Solo and K. Mahengthei, eds., *William Pettigrew 40 years in Manipur and Assam* (Imphal: Modern Press, 1986), 2. Hereafter cited as Solo, *William Pettigrew*.

⁶⁶ The reason for Major Maxwell to take this action was that the vaishnavite Hindus Meitais accused Pettigrew's teaching and preaching in the valley as a deliberate attempt to impose them the government's religion (Christianity). Major Maxwell sensing the situation concluded that to give licence to Pettigrew to preach among the Hindu

hill areas with his own risk.⁶⁷

Further Maxwell conveyed if Pettigrew undertake the training of the hill people, he would place at the missionary's disposal for this purpose a sum annually.⁶⁸ Thus a notice was served Pettigrew to stop the work:

Under instructions of the local government I have the honour to inform you (Pettigrew) that owing to the state being administered on behalf of the minor Raja no missionary of any denomination intending to work in the state territory can be admitted into Manipur without the previous sanction of the chief commissioner of Assam.⁶⁹

Pettigrew is silent as to what he did, where he went next after given up his work in Imphal before landing in Ukhrul.⁷⁰ In January 1896, he decided to begin his work at Ukhrul.⁷¹ By this time the Arthington Mission was no longer in a position to support his work in Manipur. Pettigrew contacted the American rather than the British Mission.⁷² In December 1895 he was ordained and in January 1896 his appointment as American Baptist minister was confirmed.⁷³

The first thing Pettigrew did was starting a school. In this Maxwell assisted him by forcing the Tangkhul chiefs to send their boys to the school. Despite the support of Maxwell the political agent, the early years at Ukhrul were difficult ones. The progress was very slow and set backs were frequent. In 1901 after five years of work twelve of the boys attending the school confessed Christ and were baptised. In 1902, the first Baptist Church in Manipur was organised

Manipuris would mean to wage war against the state native religion. Thus he was allowed to carry on for only six months. See also Lal Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988), 134. (Hereafter cited as Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism*).

⁶⁷Solo, *William Pettigrew*, 2-3. During those days hill areas were under the direct administration of British government of India.

⁶⁸Cf. Singh, *History of Christian Mission*, 63

⁶⁹Notification No. 806, dated 11th December 1894 addressed to Pettigrew by Political Agent of Manipur.

⁷⁰At least there are two traditions about Pettigrew's work during sixteen months gap before starting Ukhrul mission, among the Christians of Manipur. The southern tradition, according to this, he went to the Kuki village of Sevon and asked the chief Kamkholum Singson for permission to work in that place. When the permission was denied then went to the Tangkhul area and started his work. The northern tradition has it that Pettigrew went to Mao Songson village and tried to buy land but the sixteen Khulakpas refused to give permission, informing the missionary that they wanted nothing to do with religion and asked him to leave the place immediately. Then he went to the Tangkhul area. Cf. Downs, *Mighty Works*, 77. See also K. Hepuni, ed., *Manipur North Naga Baptist Association Church History* (Punanamai: MNNBA Golden Jubilee Publication, 1976), 3. (Hereafter cited as Hepuni, *MNNBA*). See also R. R. Lolly, *The Baptist Church in Manipur* (Imphal: Modern Printer, 1985), 22-23. (Hereafter cited as Lolly, *Baptist Church in Manipur*).

⁷¹Luikham, *Manipur Christian*, 13

⁷²The reason for him to contact American Mission was due to his view on baptism and possibly because it was working among the Nagas in Nagaland.

⁷³Downs, *Mighty Works*, 78. The Assam Mission records indicate that the missionary union took over the Manipur field from the Arthington Mission on 1st February 1896.

at Ukhrul, and until 1916 the only one.⁷⁴ By 1917 Pettigrew had three hundred thirty five church members and five churches.⁷⁵ The growing increase in local churches and the widening of the frontier of the missionary necessitated the formation of what was known as the Manipur Christian Association in November 1916, and its first convention was held at Ukhrul in 1917.⁷⁶ In 1928 MCA was changed to Manipur Baptist Convention. Today MBC have 29 Associations, 1272 Churches and 1, 82,576 baptized members.⁷⁷

4.4. Welsh (Presbyterian) Mission

The Welsh Presbyterians (Welsh Calvinist Methodists) began their work in Cherrapunji in 1841.⁷⁸ Cherrapunji at that time was an isolated and thinly populated village inspite of being the British district headquarters. The first missionaries were Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Jones I.⁷⁹ The first missionaries were strongly opposed by the Khasis. In spite of all the oppositions the missionaries continued their works and as a result people began to showed interest in religion of the missionaries. Gradually people began to confess Christian faith and seek membership in the church; but strict rules were employed by the missionaries. Such as:

1. They should completely disclaim all traditional religious practices and rituals,
2. They should faithfully observe Sunday (Sabbath), i.e., by attending Church and not doing any work,
3. They should have knowledge of the fundamental principles of Christianity,
4. They should live in a manner befitting the Gospel.⁸⁰

The Mission center was shifted to Nogsawlia hill near Cherrapunji in 1843 as the village chief gave this place to the missionaries. It was from this place the missionaries could begin their serious mission as the first conversion took place on 8th March, 1846.⁸¹ In spite of severe opposition, the Welsh Mission gradually expanded their works even other hill areas. However, Christian community among the Khasis and Jaitias grew very slow till 1880s. Despite the slow growth of Christianity educational system was established in many places by 1866. By 1870 the school graduate also began to take up teaching position. By 1891 there were 2147 communicants in the Khasis churches. By 1929 they grew to 15,885. Thus, by the end of the 19th century and

⁷⁴ Downs, *Mighty Works*, 80

⁷⁵ Milton sangma, *American Baptist Mission in North East India* (Dibrugarh: NEIHA, 1981), 191. (Hereafter cited Sangma, *American BM*).

⁷⁶ Dena, *Christian Mission and Colonialism*, 38

⁷⁷Cf. "Report of the General Secretary of Manipur Baptist Convention for the year 2011" Presented at the Annual Meeting of CBCNEI held at Hamren Town Baptist Church, Karbi Anglong from April 27-29, 2012, 62.

⁷⁸Cf. John H. Morris, *The History of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission: To the End of the Year 1904* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company 1996), 178. (Hereafter cited as Morris, *Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission*).

⁷⁹Cf. Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 70.

⁸⁰Snaitang, *Christianity and Social Change*, 71.

⁸¹Cf. Morris, *Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission*, 179.

early parts of 20th century the Welsh Presbyterian Mission had well established both church structure and educational systems among the Khasis and Jaintias.⁸²

Presbyterian mission work among the Mizos began in the year 1897 with the arrival of D.E. Jones a missionary accompanied by a Khasi who resigned from his job of school inspector in order to be a missionary to the Mizos. In 1899 the two Mizos by name Khuma and Khara were converted and baptized as the first Christian in Mizoram. By 1929 the Mizo Christian community grew to more than 27720. However, the rapid growth of Christianity in Mizoram is attributed to revival movement which was started in 1906 and intensified in 1913 and further intensified in 1919 and 1929.⁸³

Today the Presbyterian Church of India (PCI) is one of the mainline Protestant Churches in India with over one million believers, mostly in North East India. PCI is an apex body comprising eight Synods such as Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod, Cachar Hill Tribes Synod, Manipur Presbyterian Church Synod, Biateram Presbyterian Church Synod, Ri Bhoi Presbyterian Church Synod, Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod Sepngi (KJP Synod Sepngi), KJP Synod Mihngi, and Zou Presbyterian Church Synod. The PCI has its headquarters in Shillong. The PCI Subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith and maintains relationship with denominations such as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Uniting Church in Australia. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), and the Council for World Mission (CWM) through PCI. It is also supported by the Welsh parent Church. Locally, it has ties with the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (CBCNEI) and the Church of North India (CNI).

Association/Affiliation ==

- * National Council of Churches in India (NCCI): A member.
- * World Council of Churches (WCC) - a member.
- * World Alliance of Reformed Churches - a member.
- * Maraland Presbyterian Church is an affiliated church under Mizoram Presbyterian Church.

4.5. The Anglican Church

The Anglican did not have missionaries as such in the early parts their present in the NEI.⁸⁴ They did have a few regular chaplains to look after the spiritual affairs of the European government official members of their denomination. The earliest Anglican Mission in North East India was a

⁸²Downs, *History of Christianity*, 88-90, 95.

⁸³Cf. Morris, *Welsh Calvinistic Methodists Foreign Mission*, 180.

⁸⁴Cf. Mathew, Muttumana, *Christianity in Assam and Inter-Faith Dialogue: A Study on the Modern Religious Movements in North East India* (Indore: 1984), 124. (Hereafter cited as Muttumana, *Christianity in Assam*).

clergyman, Rev. A. Grastin, Chaplain of Sylhet who visited the scattered Europeans, who were beginning to come to Assam valley in 1841.⁸⁵ The Anglican chaplains who were serving in the region were appointed by Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) who were strongly influenced by Anglo-Catholicism.⁸⁶ In 1842, Calcutta Bishop, Wilson appointed Rev. Robert Bland as Chaplain of Assam. In 1844 he reached Assam, where he took charge at Guwahati.⁸⁷ He brought with him a young man by name Roach from Dacca to as clerk as at that time Assam was within the Diocese of Calcutta.⁸⁸ To revive the Mission he tour extensively in Assam including Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Jaipur and Goalpara. It was in his time a new Anglican Church was built at Guwahati, called 'Christ Church'.⁸⁹

Apart from the work of chaplains work did on the tea gardens, a British officer Capt. J.T. Gordon and Anglican who took over a small Anglican mission in around 1848 at Tezpur. Two German missionaries, C.H. Hessdelmeyer and G. Dauble were assigned to this field to work among the Kacharis, with the promises of financial help from British officials.⁹⁰ To assist Hesselmeyer, a young deacon Sydney Endle, a missionary appointed by SPG arrived at Tezpur in 1864.⁹¹ In 1865 he was entrusted to work and minister among tea planters and also the Kachari tribesmen. Later in 1869, Endle was appointed Chaplain of Darrang district with the charge of Kachari Mission.⁹² By 1864 there were few converts of Kacharis but the mission was not successful as expected. However, by the end of 19th century there were more than five hundred (500) Anglican members in Assam.⁹³ From the beginning, the Anglican Church in Assam was under the jurisdiction of Calcutta diocese but because of detachment Assam was raised to a Suffragan diocese in 1914. Finally, the Assam Diocese was created in 1915 Rev. Herbert Pankenham Walsh,⁹⁴ was consecrated as the first Anglican Bishop in NEI.⁹⁵ In 1946 Nirod Biswas was consecrated the first Indian Bishop of Anglican Church in the region.⁹⁶ And in 1970 the Assam Diocese of Anglican Church merged with other diocese of Anglican Indian Church with the Church of North India which inaugurated on the 29th November 1970, and thus Anglican Church cease to exist in India as separate body. Consequently, the Diocese of Assam became one of the Dioceses of the Church of North India.⁹⁷

⁸⁵Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 33.

⁸⁶This led to conflict with the American Baptist Missionaries. Each would try to take away members from churches of the other. This problem seems to have been most intense during the middle of the century and was largely due to the attitudes of the local chaplains rather than the Church of England itself.

⁸⁷Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 33.

⁸⁸Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 33.

⁸⁹Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 17.

⁹⁰Cf. Downs, *Christianity in NEI*, 112.

⁹¹They were employed by Gordon for the purpose of evangelizing the people of Bhutan. But when they failed they turned to Kacharis.

⁹²⁹²Cf. Muttumana, *Christianity in Assam*, 128.

⁹³Cf. Downs, *Christianity in NEI*, 89.

⁹⁴Cf. M.E. Gibbs, *The Anglican Church in India 1600-1970* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1972), 352.

⁹⁵Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 129. During those days there was very small clerical (clergy) staff in Assam, consisting of three Europeans- one Government Chaplain, one Additional Clergy Society Chaplain and one Chaplain Missionary and four Indian, three priests and one Deacon.

⁹⁶Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 157.

⁹⁷Cf. Talibudding, *Anglican Church*, 209-211.

4.6. Lutheran Church

The Gossner Lutheran Mission began its evangelical activities in Chotanagpur much earlier in than 1845.⁹⁸ When the missionaries came to Chotanagpur,⁹⁹ there was crisis between them and the local people. Thereupon thousands left Chotanagpur to work in other parts of India. Many migrated to Assam to work in tea gardens for their livelihood. Among those who immigrated were Lutheran Christians.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the Lutheran Mission began in Assam through these tribals emigrants. They started a small Lutheran mission in Assam particularly in tea garden. Slowly a Church was built and a native pastor was ordained in 1900. With the request of the local people on July 10, 1919 the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church at Chotanagpur and Assam was established.¹⁰¹ The main station of the Lutheran Church in Assam was in Tezpur, where the church members were mainly from tea-garden workers and emigrants but was an active church.

The second batch of Lutheran mission to work in NEI was the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. In reality, they were Santhals, who came to Assam as tribals emigrants from Bihar in search of jobs. They embraced Lutheranism through the work of L.O. Skrefsrud and H.P. Boerresen, who work under the Gossner Mission. As such Lutheranism was flourished in various parts of Assam and also in the neighboring area, particularly in the areas of Boros and Garos. The first three Santhal converts were Siram, Jogot and Rahgu, who took baptism in 1869.¹⁰² Now there are 46,303 Lutheran members with 344 communities and around 60 pastors who are working in various Lutheran mission stations in NEI. In Assam alone now they have 14 parishes and two mission field and 7500 families in Assam. Lutheran churches spread to almost all the parts of NEI today.

⁹⁸Cf. Robert Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam*, (London: 1966), 135.

⁹⁹This great folk-church in the province of Chota Nagpur had its beginnings when four missionaries sent by the Gossner Missionary Society and prepared by Father Johannes Gossner, arrived in Calcutta in 1844 with instructions to find a mission field. When the new missionaries, who were chiefly farmers and artisans rather than theologians, came into contact with some street laborers of aboriginal stock (known as "Kols") they resolved to follow them to their native habitat in Chota Nagpur. Arriving in Ranchi in 1845 they established their base there and supported themselves by farming. After much initial frustration a few converts were made in 1850. Soon a mass movement among the Kols gathered momentum. Particularly after the Sepoy Mutiny (1857) the people began to embrace Christianity in increasing numbers, so that by 1900 a community of 100,000 had arisen. Boys' and girls' boarding schools were established at Ranchi and elsewhere. A normal school, theological seminary, hospital, and leper asylum were added. Missionary work was begun among Kols people who migrated to the province of Assam. Work was carried on among ten language groups. The Church by 1984 had 336,524 baptized members. Despite rapid numerical growth the Gossner Church, formally organized in 1919, has been plagued by a succession of problems. The formation of schismatic churches among the Kols people by the Anglican SPG in 1869 and by Roman Catholics at the end of the century resulted in heavy losses to the Gossner Church. Oppression by Muslim and Hindu rulers created additional hardship. Rivalry between the principal Kolarian tribes -- Mundas and Uraons--- has hindered complete unity in the Church. Finally, the interment of German missionaries in 1914 left the Church "orphaned" and without financial subsidy. In 1919, through the good offices of the National Missionary Council of India, the Gossner Autonomous Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed and became heir to all mission property. An inter-denominational board of Trustees, of which an American Lutheran was executive secretary, temporarily administered its affairs. Lutherans in America promised "means and men" to maintain the field, and the National Lutheran Council sent subsidies. German missionaries were able to return in 1925, but their service is to an autonomous church. The Lutheran World Federation assisted support of Gossner institutions with grants.

¹⁰⁰C. Becker, *History of the Catholic Missions in North East India: 1890-1915* (Shillong: Kerma KLM Pvt. Ltd., 1980), 49. (Hereafter referred to as Becker, *Catholic Mission*).

¹⁰¹Cf. Becker, *Catholic Mission*, 79.

¹⁰²Cf. Becker, *Catholic Mission*, 138.

5. Other Denominations

Today Christian denominationalism is a reality and its influence cannot be measured in the history of Christianity. NEI is not different from any other areas regarding the spread of denominations. Now we have many denominations apart from the above discussions. Such as General Conference Baptist mission, Australian Baptist Mission, Mid-Mission, Salvation Army, Church of God, Jehovah Witness Church, Unitarian Church, Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal Church, Seventh Day Adventists, the Pentecostal,¹⁰³ Mara Evangelical Church, Christian Revivals Church, The Salvation Army,¹⁰⁴ The Revival Church of God, The Independent Church of India, The Evangelical Free Church of India,¹⁰⁵ etc and etc. Due to these many denominations the Christian community in NEI faces tension among themselves. Some of these churches are known for their tendency to seek converts from among existing Christian groups rather than from among non-Christians.

6. Impact of Christianity on the North East Indian Society

The absent of a single language created the spirit of disunity among the North East Indian Tribes. It was hard for any outsider to come into contact with the region. However, with the coming of British Administration the Gospel also entered into the region. The encounter between the Gospel and the People of North East India has brought tremendous changes especially in the hill people both positive as well as negatives where it was not sanskritized. The following are some of the major impact of Christianity upon the people of NEI.

6.1. Positive Transformations

6.1. 1. *Impact upon the Religious Lifestyle of the People*

In their old traditional faiths their lives were full of fear and innumerable superstitions. They observed different kinds of gennas and taboos in order to appease the spirits so that they attain good life in this world. The function of the rites and taboos observance was to temporarily liberate people from the harmful activities of malevolent spirits. But the acceptance of the gospel of Christ liberated them from all such fears, sacrifices to the spirits, practice of divination and omen. Thus today almost all the ancestor religious rituals and practices have disappeared among many tribes of NEI. This new faith in Christ impelled them to ‘a complete turning away from

¹⁰³Downs, *Christianity in NEI*, 151.

¹⁰⁴Salvation Army found its foothold first in Silchar and Mizoram in between 1945-1950. At present the Headquarters is situated at Lamka in Manipur. See also L.Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1996), 103-121. (Hereafter cited as Jeyaseelan, *Missionary Movement in Manipur*).

¹⁰⁵Their headquarters establish at Shillong. They have twelve districts in NEI. They are (1) Saikot, (2) Imphal, (3) Thanlon, (4) Senvon, (5) Vangai, (6) Cachar District, (7) North Cachar Hills, (8) Kholian-Mizoram, (9) Sakordai Mizoram, (10) Lunglei Mizoram, (11) Darchoi- Tripura, (12) Kanlachera_ Tripura.

the old and a complete immersion in the new.’¹⁰⁶ They found peace and eternal life in the new faith. Many became Christians initially because; they were convinced that the new religion was more effective than the old religions in securing this objective. Belief in and fear of the spirits is still widespread among the tribal Christian. Many look upon the Sunday (no work day), in much the same way they observed the old taboo days when it was inauspicious to leave the village or carry on normal work; other substitute the Bible for the traditional charms carried to ward off evil spirits when traveling. Thus Christianity liberated the people from a world view in which they were socially psychologically enslaved by fear of spirits. Belief in the spirits continues, but it is no longer, the dominant element. Christ’s power is seen to be greater than that of spirits.

6.1.2. Emergence of Tribal Identity

The hill areas of North East India were uniformly administered until 1937 as backward tract exclusively under the chief commissioner of Assam. From 1 April 1937 there was a bifurcation of the administrative pattern. The Mizo Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills and N. E. Frontier Tracts were called excluded areas, which was guarded by the Inner Line which prevented the entry of outsiders without permit. The North Eastern Hill states as a result developed a special kind of identity, which remained crucial for subsequent political development. The hilly areas of NEI were not completely integrated with the politico-ecosystem of colonial period and the Inner Line system still in vogue further isolated the tribal region of North East from the rest of the country.¹⁰⁷

Christianity has emerged as a strong factor of modernisation, and have given the tribes a sense of identity. The phenomenal rise of Christianity in all North Eastern states excluding Arunachal Pradesh, became a symbol of tribal identity. With this the extension of British raj in the region with the formation of different administrative units helped in developing a sense of identity and alliances among different tribes.¹⁰⁸ In developing a sense of larger tribal identity demand for representation of tribal population in Provincial Legislative Assembly started in 1930’s. A growing sense of ethnic identity among different communities in North East and the fear of loosing identity – all these factors combined together contributed to the growth of ethno-political movements in NEI. Indeed the tribal movement in the NEI is aspiration and a manifestation of fight for identity. The rising tribal aspirations are expressed through movement on cultural identity crisis; the basis of this crisis is economic resources. Thus “identity crisis is an urban phenomenon rooted among the rising petty bourgeoisie and middle class with definite class solidarity all over North East India.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, Christianity provided an ideology that helped the

¹⁰⁶Cf. A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 114

¹⁰⁷Cf. B. Datta Ray, *Tribal Identity and Tension in North East India* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1989), 5. (Hereafter cited as Ray, *Tribal Identity*).

¹⁰⁸Ray, *Tribal Identity*, 6-7

¹⁰⁹Ray, *Tribal Identity*, 9

tribal people maintain their identity in the face of serious erosion of their traditional religious, social and political institutions.

6.1.3. *New Social Order for the North Easterners*

With the introduction of Christianity, brought a great transformation in the socio-cultural life of the North East Indian society. In the ancient days they had no separate places for cattle, pigs, and fowls, all lived together in the same house. But today the condition is entirely different in the region. Today in the village they have arrangement for separate stables, poultry and pens, houses are equipped with modern fillings, bathrooms, lavatories, the style and mode of living has changed greatly.¹¹⁰ Festivals and feasts were marked with drinking rice beer, singing and dancing, but today all the festivals are replaced by Christian colours especially in the hill society. Today rice beer has been replaced by tea and soft drink among many societies of this region. The olden educational systems, which were done in the dormitories among the hill tribe of this region, are replaced by western educational system, which was brought by Christianity.

Christianity brought the tribal wars, and headhunting to an end by Christian emphasis on love for neighbor and enemy alike, and promoted new social order.¹¹¹ The headhunting energy and enthusiasm had been diverted towards the furtherance of the Gospel in the unreached areas by the young.¹¹² Villages of the same tribe that had previously been at war with each other were brought together in presbyteries and Associations. Thus evangelism and Church structures fostered a sense of tribal and regional identity which was absent earlier. Thus, the impact of Christianity on the socio-cultural life of the society has radically transformed and lifted their lives towards modern civilization.

6.1.4. *Emergence of Literature for the People*

Education and Christianity came to be closely identified in North East India. Education is one of the most powerful agencies for bringing transformation in the life of the people of NEI. The schools were not only the primary agents of evangelism but also of the new order. The education imparted by the Christians lifted the people from ignorance, illiteracy, savagousness and superstitions. Education prepared them for new occupations. It gave them greater mobility and it encouraged a great interaction with people not only of their own tribes.¹¹³ Thus education brought by Christianity transformed the minds and improved their way of living in and outside the community.

¹¹⁰Cf. F. S. Downs, *Essay on Christianity in North East India* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1994), 203

¹¹¹Cf. Horam, *Cultural Life of Nagas*, 88

¹¹²Cf. Sir James Johnstone, *My Experience in Manipur and the Naga Hills* (London: 1896), 29.

¹¹³Cf. M. Horam, *North East India a Profile* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1990), 174-180

Moreover, the impact of Christian influence through its literacy and literature programme is remarkable. In Assam, Christians were acknowledged for bringing the Asamese language renaissance by stopping the govt., effort to introduce Bengali as official language. In the hill areas the impact was seen great because the missions gave the various tribes their first literature. Since Christianity without the Bible was unthinkable to the Protestants, the missionaries when they entered into a new field, reduced the language to writing. No hill tribe at that time had a written language. The Christian literature contributed to the developing sense of tribal identity. In providing written language, Christianity prepared the tribal to adjust to the new social, economic and political situation, in which they found themselves.

6.2. Negative Influences

6.2.1. Socio-Cultural Life

Western Christianity regarded their culture as the only valid expression of Christian culture, they considered everything non-Christian as the product of depraved human being under the control of Satan.¹¹⁴ With such concept Christianity came to the People of NEI. Without an indepth knowledge of the people and their culture, they condemned them as un-Christian. In the midst of diversity of the people the western style of Christianity was introduced and thus, created more difficulty for the people to come together in term of their religious respect for each others. Therefore, Christianity has failed to understand the rich culture of the people of this region, which imbalances the true nature of the gospel and slow down the progress of the gospel.

6.2.2. Unhealthy Individualism

The spread of Christianity among the people of NEI was accompanied by unhealthy individualism that is insensitive to social concerns and justice of the people. Thus, Udayan Misra writes:

Christianity and Western education brought in new values based on individualism which posed a direct challenge to the collective life-pattern of the people.¹¹⁵

So their mind of socialism was replaced by individualism and started working for their own benefits. The good culture of community sharing of meals, meat, vegetables and ther things had almost vanished. Therefore the introduction of individualism by Christianity has affected the very life of the people and their culture.

¹¹⁴Cf J. T. Seamands, *Tell It Well: Communicating Gospel Across Cultures* (Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981), 42

¹¹⁵Cf. Udayan Misra, "Naga Nationalism and the Role of the Middle Class", *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North East India*, ed. B. Dutta Ray (New Delhi: Uppal, 1983), 154

6.2.3. Christian Values

Selfishness, greed, dishonesty and corruption are rampant among the NEI society today. Christianity had failed to impart fully Christian values among the communities in North East India. Such failure was exposed especially during the ethnic clashes between Nagas and Kukis, Garos and Rabhas, Assamese and hill tribals, Bodos and Muslim etc and etc. had revealed the extent to which Christian values have played the role, negatively. Therefore, Christianity has not always been able to preserve Christian values such as love, honesty, simplicity, justice; democratic procedures, dignity of human life etc.¹¹⁶ . Indeed nowhere else in India has the encounter between society and Christianity so deeply transformed and affected the people as in the society of North East India, in many areas of their lives, such as religious life, philosophy of life, marriage, family, education, economic life, political structures, status of women, and socio-cultural life etc.¹¹⁷

7. Christianity and Its Impact on the North East Indian Society

7.1. Western Culture at the Expense of the Erosion of Native Culture

There is no doubt that Christianity brought great changes in the socio-cultural life of the people of these region. Foremost among those changes (and there are many indeed) would include the better living conditions of the people – hygienic or sanitised way of life, which the people of the past were not accustomed to especially in relation to the animal husbandry within close perimeter of the homes.¹¹⁸ While Christianity and has contributed so much toward the conscientization and development of the people, we cannot also at the same time romanticize the whole issue. Anyone with a constructively-critical mind (be it foreign or native), would be able to realize that it also has its fair share of negative impact upon the people.

Western Christianity regarded western culture as the only valid expression of Christian culture; they considered everything non-Christian as the product of depraved human being under the control of Satan.¹¹⁹ With such concept Christianity came to Poumai society as it did to most of the tribal contexts. Without indepth knowledge of the tribal culture, they condemned it as un-Christian. As a result, almost all the cultural elements of the natives (without distinguishing between good and bad or between life-affirming ones and the destructive ones), were made to be discarded and thus left to erode with the passage of time.

¹¹⁶Cf. Karotemprel, *Impact of Christianity*, 43

¹¹⁷Cf. Karotemprel, *Impact of Christianity*, 48

¹¹⁸See F. S. Downs, *Essay on Christianity in North East India* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1994), 203

¹¹⁹J. T. Seamands, *Tell It Well: Communicating Gospel Across Cultures* (Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981), 42

7.2. Christianity's Message of Personal Salvation equals Individualism at the Cost of Communitarian Values of Old

Christianity preached Personal salvation or salvation of personal soul while that is also part of the Gospel's message gave way to self-centered or individualistic concept and way of life for the natives. The old community-centered understanding and pattern of life gradually began to lose its ground in the minds and actions of the people. Besides, Christianity's emphasis on the 'other-worldly' aspect of salvation also gave rise to the people's insensitivity towards social concerns and justice of the people. Thus Udayan Misra is justified when he writes:

Christianity and Western education brought in new values based on individualism which posed a direct challenge to the collective life-pattern of the people.¹²⁰

So their mind of socialism was replaced by individualism and started working for their own benefits. In the past there was no serious problem of corruption in the society in those days but today due to the influence of western culture, capitalist form of corruption is common in the society. The good culture of community sharing of meals, meat, vegetables and other things had almost vanished today. Therefore the introduction of individualism by Christianity has affected the life of the Church to a very great extent.

7.3. Human-Centered View of Religion at the Expense of Creation-Oriented Traditional Belief

A good number of historians, both native and foreign, often delight in recounting how the tribals in their traditional faiths lived in great fear of the powers of nature and of innumerable superstitions attached to it. While they are not wrong in holding the view that the tribals' religious life includes sacrifices to the spirits, practice of divination and omen, they fail to recognize the underlying concept of people being one with the world of nature or of creation. Thus today almost all the ancestral religious rituals and practices have disappeared among the Poumai tribes as this new faith in Christ impelled them to 'a complete turning away from the old and a complete immersion in the new.'¹²¹ Christianity came with the message of condemning the old tribal religion as satanic. Hence, it is no wonder, that the village authorities in the traditional

¹²⁰Udayan Misra, "Naga Nationalism and the Role of the Middle Class", *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North East India*, ed. B. Dutta Ray (New Delhi: Uppal, 1983), 154

¹²¹A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 114

world considered that the evangelists come to Poumai land to abolish the traditions of the forefathers.

Selfishness, greed, dishonesty and corruption are rampant among the Poumai society today. Christianity had failed to impart fully Christian values among the Poumai community as well as other tribal communities in North East India. Such failure was exposed especially during the ethnic clashes between Nagas and Kukis and had revealed the extent to which Christian values have played the role, negatively. Therefore, Christianity has not always been able to preserve Christian values such as love, honesty, simplicity, justice, democratic procedures, dignity of human life etc.¹²² The Christianity that the tribals were exposed to, was a very divided one; divided on historical, denominational, doctrinal, catechetical and ethical basis.¹²³ It is a fact that historical rivalries that are prevalent in western countries were transferred to the tribal society. Due to such crisis the life and mission of the Church have slowed progress and development. Therefore, Christianity failed to eradicate division and rivalries in their presentation of the gospel wherever they went.

7.4. Western Education Replaces Native Form of Learning

On the one hand, Western education introduced by Christianity is one of the most powerful agencies for bringing transformation in the life of Poumai society. The education imparted by the Christians lifted the people from ignorance, illiteracy and superstitions.¹²⁴ It gave them greater mobility and it encouraged a great interaction with people not only of their own tribes.¹²⁵ Thus education brought by Christianity transformed the minds and improved their way of living in and outside the community. On the other hand, we also need to critically reflect upon the western form of education and the mentality that accompanied it. It took it for granted that western form of education is the only one or the only true and universal form of education that the uncivilized world such as that of the tribals need. It thus belittled and condemned the traditional pattern of education. In the past, Poumai Nagas like many other Naga tribes maintained community-structured pattern of education especially through the *Kheloukiziifii* (Morung/dormitory) system – through which young men and women receive

¹²²Cf. Karotemprel, *Impact of Christianity*, 43

¹²³S. Karotemprel, "The Impact of Christianity on the Tribes of North East India", *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, ed. J. Puthenpurakal (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publication, 1996), 43. Hereafter cited as Karotemprel, *Impact of Christianity*.

¹²⁴Interview with Mr. W. Vino (Head Master Afii government L. P. School), Tunggam Afii village, May 10, 1999

¹²⁵See M. Horam, *North East India a Profile* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1990), 174-180

holistic education needed for their lifetime.¹²⁶ Thus, the western form of education does not truly connect with the life situations, aspirations, experiences and needs of the people.

7.7. Western Christianity Reinforces the Degradation of Women in Poumai Naga Society

The Poumai Naga society from the olden times is patriarchal and the family inheritance follows the male line, hence no female has any right to claim property. All the Naga tribes have a concept of difference between men and women in their social status. Among the Nagas if a girl is born the name is given on the fifth day, if it is a boy on the sixth day to show that man is superior to woman.¹²⁷ Traditional culture and its customs have several restrictions (taboos) related to women. As such, any men are held above women in almost every aspect of life in the community.

Education was one of the serious social concerns of the early missionaries among the tribals. It served as an opening toward the upliftment of the tribal community for better standard of life. When education was introduced among the Poumais through the agency of western Christianity, the initial privilege was taken by the boys. However in the course of time, Christian missionaries and evangelists encouraged the people to send both the boys and girls for learning. In that sense, education along with other social transformations brought by Christianity helped the community to a very great extent.

Having said that, when it comes to issue of the status of women in Poumai society Christianity also plays an important role in it. While Christianity preached the message of salvation, forgiveness and equality of all – men, women and children before God – it also endorsed the concept of the superiority of men over women. Christianity being western in everything, missionaries coming from their own western socio-cultural set up where male domination is so potent, when they came to the world of the tribals, they could not really remain true to the teaching of the Scriptures but were influenced and driven by their own male-centered worldview. The Bible as a whole was read and interpreted from the lens of men and thus they

¹²⁶For detail information on the curriculum and components of Kheloukiziifii system of education refer Vipunii's article in this publication.

¹²⁷Lolly, *Baptist Church in Manipur*, 77.

re-enforced male-domination with its support. As such even today, women in the Poumai Naga community – Church and society – are not treated equally with men. Poumai community has still long way to go to reach a state where their women can be truly liberated and accepted on equal terms with men. The Church in particular is still much steep in its male-oriented view of life; its total structure is defined by male-domination.

For those writers (the natives in particular) who write that Poumai women are treated equally or that there is no discrimination on its women are nothing short of (intentional or not), ignoring the reality and living in a make-believe world. Unless, everyone wake up and honestly deal with the reality, the whole of the society will have a difficult time in progressing toward any real advancement mainly because it is not at all possible for any sane human community to do so when the half section of the society is subjugated.

Conclusion

As our Church gains in years of its existence it is of crucial importance that it also grows in every aspect of its life and work. As Christianity came into the soil of our land and people it undoubtedly brought a lot of transformative contributions in its wake for which our people are, and will, always remain indebted to it and to the western world. However, for us to truly grow and prosper as a people, we also need to put to use the wisdom and understanding that God has given to us, be able to recognize and be willing to confront the reality of the negative impacts that it had upon our people and our culture as a whole. Our history should not be filled only with uncritical records of our benefactors' great deeds but it should be 'our' people's history from 'our' perspective. We must be courageous enough to tell and write the truth (calling black as black and white as white), no matter how unimpressive they might sound sometimes. If and when we take this stance, we will progress in the real sense of the term.