

**Shifting Gazes Contesting Voices: Travel Accounts of American Baptist  
Missionaries in Assam and the Naga Hills**

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by

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**CERTIFICATE**

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## DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis titled “**Shifting Gazes Contesting Voices: Travel Accounts of American Baptist Missionaries in Assam and the Naga Hills**”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

A number of events came together in the first half of the Nineteenth century and acted as a catalyst, shaping the colonial fabric and the history of Christianity of the North-Eastern region of India. The Treaty of Yandabo, between the English East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826 at the end of the first Anglo-Burman war, brought widespread changes.<sup>1</sup> With the Burmese forces defeated by the British, the Brahmaputra Valley came under British Control, yoking the region to the rest of British India in 1836. This was the first event to influence not only the socio-political, but also the religious fabric of the North-Eastern region of India. An earlier event was the change in attitude of the East India Company officials with regard to evangelical and missionary activities in India. By 1813, there were two growing factions among the East India Court of Directors, with one group inclined toward Christianizing India (headed by Charles Grant and Edward Parry) while the other group of political liberals like Sir John Malcolm proposed caution in dealing with indigenous civilization and beliefs.<sup>2</sup> The passing of the Charter Act of 1813 (also known as the East India Company Act 1813) by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, permitting missionaries to preach the Gospel in India, resulted in the establishment of Serampore College in 1818. The Charter was also responsible for enabling the Missionaries of Serampore to extend their activities to the North-Eastern Frontiers of India.<sup>3</sup> These changes with regard to mission activities in the colonies contrasted with the restrictions put by the East India Company in 1793 when William Carey, The English missionary landed in Calcutta. Prohibited from preaching in Calcutta, Carey had to make Serampore, a Danish territory, his headquarters.<sup>4</sup>

When the charter of the Company came up for renewal in 1833, the Evangelicals in parliament argued successfully toward linking commercial interests with a humanitarian obligation. This united the common interests of the Evangelicals, missionaries and

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<sup>1</sup> Downs, Frederick S. *History of Christianity in India, Vol V, Part 5: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992. 6-7. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, Mani Chawla. *Gender, religion and Heathen Lands: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860s-1940s)*. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 2000. 41-2. Print.

<sup>3</sup> Sangma, Milton S, *History of American Baptist Mission in North East India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987. 17. Print.

<sup>4</sup> Singh. 39.

commercial groups. As a result, the Company removed the entry restrictions for missionary societies to India in the same year. The next decade would see a wave of mission-sponsored activities from protestant missionaries in India such as the English, Dutch, German, other Europeans, and increasingly, North Americans.<sup>5</sup> The change brought about by the passing of the Charter Act of 1813 was the second event to shape the advent of Christianity in North-East India.

A little earlier in 1829, a branch of Carey's Serampore mission was set up at Guwahati under James Rae, with the patronage of David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier. Another catalyst to further bring changes to the North-East Frontier or the province of Assam was the whole gamut of Orientalist discourses and researches following the efforts of the Orientalist scholar Sir William Jones, the founder of The Asiatick Society of Bengal in 1784. The publication of the "Asiatick Researches", Lord Macaulay's "Minute", and the countless writings by travellers, Imperial agents, anthropologists, missionaries, and cartographers contributed actively in constructing knowledge about the orient/s. I'd like to identify this trend of Orientalist discourses by "foreign" visitors to the North-Eastern Frontier as the third significant event that contributed to shaping and defining this particular region to the rest of the country, and broadly speaking, to the rest of the world.

### **The Second Great Awakening: All Roads Lead to Assam**

Meanwhile in America, the emergence of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Affairs in June 1810 ushered in a new era in American foreign mission enterprise. Known as the Second Great Awakening in America, the phenomenon created an interest in foreign missions to spread the gospel in non-Christian worlds. William Carey's letters and pamphlets were widely read by the American Baptists, who provided the Serampore mission with funds and sent the first American Baptist missionaries to India. This was the fourth and last event which would impact the entire colonial motif of the province of Assam. These four events, I'd like to stress, are in no way strictly chronological in terms of timelines, but took shape gradually in a largely amorphous sequence of events, brought into effect by larger events in the theatre of Imperialist politics.

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<sup>5</sup> Singh. 42-3.



Adoniram Judson with his wife Ann Judson and Samuel Newell reached Calcutta on June 1812, but the policies of the Company concerning missionary activities at the time prevented them from actual mission work in India. Newell left for Isle of Man while Judson and his wife went on to Rangoon to lay down the foundation of the Burmese Baptist Mission.<sup>6</sup> Nathan and Eliza Brown responded to Judson's appeals for more missionaries to Burma with "a desire to go and stand for the help of the Lord against the mighty..."<sup>7</sup> The Browns landed in Calcutta on May 1833 and sailed to Burma, reaching Moulmein on June 1833. On June 1835, a proposal was made to the Burma mission by Rev. W. H. Pearce of the English Baptist mission in Calcutta, stating that the American Baptists would be welcome to work among the natives in Assam, the province having become a part of the British Empire. Major Jenkins, the Commissioner-general of Assam, had written to Sir Charles Trevelyan, then secretary of the East India government, inviting missionaries to the province of Assam and promising them protection and assistance.<sup>8</sup> An enthusiastic decision was made to send the Browns to Assam to establish a mission, as Judson's letter of June 1835 shows:

...Brother Brown embraced the proposal with instant enthusiasm...for Assam presents a splendid opening for missionary efforts... I think of Brother Jones at Bangkok, in the southern extremity of the continent, and Brother Brown at Sadiya in Assam, on the frontiers of China— immensely distant points—and of all the intervening stations, Ava, Rangoon, Kyouk Phyoo, Moulmein and Tavoy, and the churches and schools which are springing up in every station, and throughout the Karen wilderness...<sup>9</sup>

The publication of *Journal of Two Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831 and 1832* by Charles Gutzlaff in 1834 stimulated a widespread interest among missionary societies in North America to establish mission stations in China. Gutzlaff had expressed the opinion that the Chinese would be open to missionary activities in China. While the safest routes to China were being considered by the American Baptist Mission Home Board, the official invitation offered the American Baptist Mission in Burma an opportunity for evangelical work among the Shans in Upper Assam. For the Mission Board, this was seen as an answer to the much

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<sup>6</sup> Barpujari, H K. *The American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 A.D): A Documentary Study*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1986. xii-xiii. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, E W. *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and other Labors of Nathan Brown*. Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, 1890. 40. Web.

<sup>8</sup> Brown. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Brown. 101.

sought after route, from Upper Assam to Northern Burma and finally into the interior borders of China. The subsequent result of Major Jenkins' invitation was the arrival of two missionary families, the Browns and the Cutters to the Sadiya station in Upper Assam on March 1836.<sup>10</sup> There was extensive support for missionary work in the North-East among government officials, particularly during the first three decades of British rule in the region. Government and mission entered into an easy partnership, each finding the other useful. The government found the mission useful in pacifying the hill tribes and providing them with a minimal education, the missions found the government useful in underwriting their educational work and in providing security both for themselves and their converts.<sup>11</sup>

All these significant events converged together to open up an exciting range of possibilities for the adventurer, the evangelist, the soldier, the philanthropist, and anybody to whom the discourses of "civilizing" and "upliftment" were synonymous. The Nineteenth century presents itself as a period when the North-East region was compared/contrasted with the bigger idea of India and the world. It was at this period that attempts were made to bring the region within defined categories and norms of the existing idioms of colonialism.

It is however evident that the province of Assam was initially regarded merely as an entry point to gain access into China and beyond, as Mary Mead Clark writes in her account:

...from the beginning it was never contemplated stopping alone with these tribes bordering on the frontier; but on and on, conquering and to conquer, beyond and still beyond, until these mountains should be spanned and the kingdom of our Lord extended from the Brahmaputra to the Irawady, and from the Irawady to the Yangtse...<sup>12</sup>

However the road to China remained an unrealised ambition and the Assam field emerged as a successful mission station for the American Baptist missionaries, where they stayed to evangelize the natives until the mid-twentieth century, or the eve of India's independence from Britain in 1947.

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<sup>10</sup> Sangma. 24-8.

<sup>11</sup> Downs. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, Mary Mead. *A Corner in India*. Rpt. Gauhati: Christian Literature Centre, 1978. 135. Print.

This thesis seeks to trace the journeys of three remarkable women, and at the same time attempts to “recover” their writings, by placing their accounts as legitimate voices in mission historiography, in women’s writings, and in travel literature. Plainly speaking, the framework for this thesis took shape from the contention that missionary women’s contributions and, to stretch the point, *writings* are widely unacknowledged and overlooked in mission historiography. If *some* of their writings became ‘popular’ it was done so by a limiting act of compartmentalising such narratives in a specific way that appealed to the mass imagination of a vastly Christian west.

### **Emulating Role Models**

American women reformers and evangelicals claimed to model their new ideals of womanhood not on the vapid personalities represented in literary fiction, but on real life heroines. In mission literature, it is notable just how many references are made to Mary Lyon, the pioneer of female education in America as an inspirational figure. Mary Lyon established Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, now Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts, in 1837. Eliza Brown too was an alumna of Mount Holyoke before she accompanied her husband as a missionary wife to Assam, India. Products of Mount Holyoke Seminary became trailblazers in a certain sense, and “many who organized women’s societies in the early sixties were Mt. Holyoke graduates”<sup>13</sup>. The influence of Mount Holyoke on the trajectory of overseas missions cannot be overlooked at all, as Helen Montgomery notes:

...The work of Mary Lyon had not only this indirect influence upon the future of Woman’s Missionary Societies in training up a generation of soundly educated women, but served also as a direct and purposeful stimulus to missionary knowledge and zeal...seventeen of her former pupils had become the wives of foreign missionaries, thirty-six others were added in the early years...<sup>14</sup>

Eliza Brown (1807-1871), Mary Mead Clark (1832-1924), and Jessie Traver Moore (1857-1936) had some things in common: Gender, Assam, and Mission. All three landed in Assam as helpmeets of their husbands. But there are marked differences and stances in the accounts

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<sup>13</sup> Montgomery, Helen Barrett. *Western Women in Eastern Lands: An Outline Study of Fifty Years of Woman’s Work in Foreign Missions*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910. 8. Web.

<sup>14</sup> Montgomery.

they left behind, and the complexities of their writings follow a trajectory of the development of a consciousness in women's writing, directly dependent on *and* contributing to the discourse of gender. I would like to reiterate at the very outset that despite their common identity as "missionary wives" their lived experiences were unique and distinct from each other, providing readers with a multivocality of positions, ways of seeing, and ways of writing. Above all, their accounts serve as markers for different eras of missionary and colonial enterprise in Assam. It is fair to suggest that their distinctive voices can be taken as representatives of the changing norms in cultural ethos, social positionings, and the rise of a new gendered discourse between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries of mission hagiography in Assam.

The multivocality in their writings seem to derive from one specific factor, namely, time. Their writings largely reflect the changing nuances of the ages they lived in, as the three of them belonged to different eras in the history of the Assam mission. While Eliza Brown represents the first batch of missionaries to come out to Assam, arriving with her husband Nathan Brown in 1836, Mary Mead Clark and her husband Edward Winter Clark were part of the second wave of missionaries from America to Assam, landing in 1869. The long gap of almost fourteen years between the first arrivals and the second group was due to a number of events in India and America, namely the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Civil War in America, and the general feeling among the American Board of Foreign Missions that Assam was a fallow ground, better abandoned for some more productive field. Jessie Moore and her husband Pitt Moore reached Assam towards the end of 1879. The Moores were almost contemporaries of the Clarks, but not quite, as they belonged to a "younger" set and the Clarks were already considered to be old mission hands by then. They worked in Assam at a somewhat simultaneous timeline, though in different districts separated by rough topographies and virtually nonexistent roads, connected to each other only by a vague, indefinable "missionary network." Jessie Moore makes a couple of passing references to the Clarks in her journals, but it is unlikely that they frequently crossed paths with each other.

Notwithstanding the real or perceived differences in their lived experiences and writings, I will be looking at their accounts as a fluid continuity, a tradition even, of missionary women's writings on North Eastern India, specifically Assam. As such, their writings will not be seen as separate, disjointed events divorced from each other, but as a tradition of continuous writing in which perspectives, standpoints, contestations or other such events get

transformed, broadened, or limiting, according to circumstances. By undertaking this exercise, it is also my objective to stress that though missionary women's writings coalesce, often imitate, or borrow from each other, they ultimately emerge as uniquely singular accounts representing different stages of transformation in the tradition of women's writing.

### **The First Wives: Harriet Newell and Ann Judson**

While women with strong personalities like Mary Lyon set the benchmark for professional "new women" in the American female imagination post the Civil War, there emerged other new heroines to capture and articulate the romance of foreign missions, to inspire young women to go forth and spread the gospel to the best of their abilities, at the costs of their lives even. It is interesting, but perhaps not entirely surprising, that the prototype for mission hagiography appears to endorse the Ruth model, the meek woman in the Old Testament who lived to serve her husband. Patricia Hill says that while women were being drawn as participants into the mission endeavour, Biblical and historical precedents of iconic women were used to justify a wider sphere for women's talents. The examples used generally stressed on the fact that these iconic women disclaimed any rejection of femininity, and that woman's traditional role was not to be abandoned but enlarged.<sup>15</sup>

Two such figures that stand out in nineteenth century mission historiography as cult figures for later female missionaries are the missionary wives Harriet Atwood Newell and Ann Hasseltine Judson.

Harriet Newell and Ann Judson were the first missionary wives, in a manner of speaking. Both were students of Bradford academy, a school founded by evangelicals "anxious for 'mental and moral culture' of their daughters." It was a time of religious awakening in America, when young educated women were examining themselves and questioning their

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<sup>15</sup> Hill, Patricia R. *The World their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985. 69-76. Print.

“potential sphere of usefulness in the world.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, when the American Board was founded in 1810 by the Congregationalists, with the purpose of sending theological students to India, and Samuel Newell and Adoniram Judson signed up as missionaries, Harriet and Ann decided to join them as missionary wives. These first set of missionaries set sail for Calcutta in 1812. However, Harriet Newell died in 1813 at sea, before the entourage could even land in Calcutta, becoming the first “missionary martyr” as Dana Robert puts it.<sup>17</sup>

The Judsons, by a twist of circumstances, landed in Burma (Myanmar), where they established the first Baptist mission field. Subsequent accounts of mission historiography appear to have built up larger-than-life personas of the two women, who sacrificed their lives in parts unknown for the cause of spreading the gospel to the heathen. Dana Robert notes of Ann Judson, “...she died at age 38 from her hardships, but her memory continued to inspire women to missionary service...even today, Burmese Baptist women trace the organization of their women’s groups back to ‘Mother’ Ann Judson.”<sup>18</sup> Ann Judson inspired not only the Burmese women she proselytised, but she became a paragon of the ideal missionary wife for generations of Baptist missionaries in Assam. Many a times in missionary literature, especially in the accounts by female missionaries, Ann Judson is constantly referred to as “the sainted Mrs Judson.”

Edmund F. Merriam in *A History of American Baptist Missions* commends the life of Ann Judson, citing an example of her devotion to her husband. Caught in an unsavoury situation of hostility from the Burmese, and the threat of an impending war between Britain and Burma, the foreigners were leaving Burma by the dozen. Judson was away at the time among the Arakanese in Chittagong, and Ann Judson refused to leave with the rest, opting to wait for her husband’s return despite the danger to her life:

...she went on board, but before the ship had left the river, she heroically resolved to return and in the Rangoon home await the coming of her husband, or some certain news of his fate...Thus was the heroism of the devoted wife

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<sup>16</sup> Mary Kupiec Cayton. ‘Canonizing Harriet Newell: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840’. *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American protestant Empire, 1812-1960*. Eds. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Connie A. Shemo. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 74. Print.

<sup>17</sup> Robert, Dana L. *Christian Mission: How Christianity became a World Religion*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.126. Print.

<sup>18</sup> Robert.

rewarded, and in this trial brightly shone forth the exalted traits of character which in after years have made immortal the name of Ann Hasseltine Judson...<sup>19</sup>

In the “Preface” to *Three Mrs Judsons, the Female Missionaries*, Cecil B. Hartley applauds “modern progress” as the reason why “missions of women are beginning to be so clearly recognized.” Hartley, writing in 1860, declares about the female missionary that, “in this more enlightened age her usefulness is readily acknowledged.” The tendency to identify a certain type of female missionary, and establish her not only as a purity model but also as a cultural icon is the stuff of mission hagiography. The nineteenth-century North American love affair with foreign missions, and propping-up of cultural icons cannot be more clearly expressed than in Hartley’s Preface. To quote:

...England holds up her Florence Nightingale...Can we not, in America, point out *our* bright stars in the galaxy of heroines? Florence Nightingale went to minister to the bodily wants of men engaged in war, and whose trade was bloodshed. Our heroines, the Mrs. Judsons, went to minister to the sinking souls of heathens, who repaid their efforts, in many instances, by cruel persecution. Florence Nightingale went amongst her own countrymen, into a civilized land. The Mrs. Judsons went to a far-distant shore, to study an unknown tongue, to teach those whose mere earthly claim upon them was nothing...<sup>20</sup>

As for Harriet Newell, “by 1840, the first comprehensive history of American foreign missionary work as much as canonized her.” Mary Kupiec Cayton raises a pertinent point when she observes that the iconic status of Harriet Newell (or women like her) in nineteenth century evangelical Christianity “involves much more than the details of her life.” She maintains that the “story of the rise to cultural prominence of Newell and women like her involves a host of convergent cultural factors.” Firstly, she identifies the emergence of an evangelical culture, developed discursively through print. Secondly, an evangelical print culture that captured the imaginations of women, and who could envision women as cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Merriam, Edmund F. *A History of American Baptist Missions*. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1900. 24-5. Web.

<sup>20</sup> Hartley, Cecil B. Preface. *Three Mrs Judsons, the Female Missionaries*. Philadelphia: G.G. Evans, 1860. 3. Web.

heroines. The last factor was “the development of a genre of missionary memoir that positioned women as important players on a world stage.”<sup>21</sup>

And therefore Harriet Newell’s emergence as an “emblem of womanhood,” as a cultural icon that would inspire generations, is due to the large-scale proliferation of a print culture to mass audiences in the nineteenth century American evangelical world, contends Cayton. She observes that:

...Harriet Atwood Newell might have lived and died in obscurity but for the role these expanding networks of communication played in affirming the common identity and interests of evangelicals living thousands of miles from one another...<sup>22</sup>

That evangelical print culture played a crucial role in what critics call “mission propaganda,” there can be no doubt. The deification of women like Harriet Newell and Ann Judson as cultural heroines constructed new social and evangelical roles for women in missions, at the same time underscoring the importance of lay women’s continued support for overseas missions. Cayton states that the endorsement of “domestic piety” as a desirable and necessary feminine quality is unobtrusively but intricately linked to ideas of empire and cultural expansion:

...Harriet Newell became the human face of a new breed of evangelical woman who looked to use domestic piety to make a difference— not only in her household but in the world. Piety, domesticity, and sentimentalism may seem a far cry from the impulse to empire and cultural expansion. But though the connection at first seems counterintuitive, Harriet Newell’s story shows how a new evangelical literature by and for women constructed a social imaginary in which saving the world was not only women’s work, but her truest, best, and most heroic role...<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cayton. 69-70.

<sup>22</sup> Cayton. 71.

<sup>23</sup> Cayton. 87-8.



## A Mission of One's Own

In *The World their Household* Patricia Hill interrogates the masculine bent of mission historiography and the re-invention of Christianity from a particularly Victorian masculine character to a “feminization” in the later decades of the nineteenth century. She states at the outset, that despite American women’s substantial contributions to “American Protestantism’s crusade to evangelize the world,” there is a significance omission of their contributions in mission records. Women formed the majority of the rank and file of church memberships and were mostly responsible for the revival of missionary activities in the late nineteenth century under the aegis of the woman’s foreign mission movement. However, their efforts remained largely unacknowledged, and, “as so frequently happens in the writing of history, the women have simply disappeared,” says Hill.<sup>24</sup>

Almost simultaneous to this revival of American interest in foreign missions and the participation of women, Jeffrey Cox also identifies a similar trend in Britain around 1870-1945, which he calls the period of “Imperial High Noon.” During the late nineteenth century, he identifies an “American influence” which was to have wide-scale implications in the British foreign mission endeavour:

...Another American influence hit Britain in the 1880s in the form of the Student Volunteer Missionary Union (or Student Volunteer Movement [SVM] as it was generally known). Founded in America in 1886 under the auspices of the Moody revival movement, its organizers claimed that within four years 6,200 students had signed a form stating that “it is my purpose, if God permit, to become a foreign missionary” ...<sup>25</sup>

Cox concedes that this “surge of missionary recruitment” in Britain, while undeniably linked to “imperial expansion and holiness enthusiasm,” also indicated a growing interest in overseas missions among university graduates as a “respectable” career choice:

...one should not neglect the long-term payoff involved in the building up of missionary institutions, and the hard work that went into creating the missionary

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<sup>24</sup> Hill. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cox, Jeffrey. *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 186. Print.

as a respectable profession. Student delegates who signed the mission pledge found that mission societies were competing for them, able to fund them, and willing to sustain them in overseas work...<sup>26</sup>

The outcome of this new professionalism in the CMS [Church Missionary Society] was that, while it spelled out a greater requirement for, and participation of *single unmarried* women in the field, it generally obscured the participation of missionary wives on a professional level. Cox says:

...in the high imperial period it became almost impossible to continue to cover up the female nature of the missionary enterprise, largely because of the need to repeat for women what had been done before only for men, that is establish the respectability of the missionary professional...<sup>27</sup>

According to Cox, the focus of the CMS on unmarried women recruits, their assertion that such women were socially respectable and good enough to be inducted into overseas mission as professionals operated on two principles: “because they needed them, and were prepared to use them.” Nevertheless, this elevation of the social status of unmarried women further obscured the roles of the missionary wives:

...the missionary wife continued to be eclipsed in mission rhetoric until well into the twentieth century. In high imperial missionary rhetoric, respectable men were now being joined in the field, not by their wives, but by respectable unmarried women missionaries...<sup>28</sup>

This thesis explores the works of missionary wives, devoting a chapter each to the three women it has taken for study.

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<sup>26</sup> Cox. 187.

<sup>27</sup> Cox.

<sup>28</sup> Cox.

### **Retrieving Forgotten Accounts: Eliza Ballard Brown**

In the next chapter, the primary text I will consider is Elizabeth Wibberley Brown's *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and other Labors of Nathan Brown*, published in 1890. This work comprises of collected correspondence from the mission fields of Burma (Myanmar), Assam, and Japan written by Nathan Brown to his friends and family in America. However, though the volume is mainly a testimony of Rev. Brown's missionary activities in distant lands, conveyed through letters, journals and other personal notes, the publisher has included numerous entries by Nathan Brown's wife Eliza Brown too.

Nathan Brown is hugely appreciated for the establishment and editorship of the *Orunodoi*, an Assamese language magazine which was launched in 1846 and printed by the Baptist Missionary Press in Sibsagar. The Browns left Assam and returned to America in 1855, where Nathan Brown became a staunch supporter of the abolitionist movement and the fight for civil liberties. He also edited "The American Baptist" for fifteen years. After the death of his wife Eliza in 1871, he remarried and travelled to Japan as a missionary under the patronage of The Free Mission Society in 1872. Nathan Brown remained in Japan till his death on New Year's Day, 1886.

The text is a bulky volume of 612 pages, and certain selections and omissions were initially carried out by this researcher before attempting a close reading of the writings. While undertaking a study of Missions in general, and the written accounts of Missions in particular, all sorts of primary sources are indispensable and deemed equally important, due to the efforts involved in reclaiming/retrieving those texts. However, to avoid unnecessary digressions and stick to the specific area of interest in this particular case, it was decided to 'trim' down the text and to give it a more coherent, cohesive aspect for the task at hand.

First, the timeline of the arrival of the Browns to Assam from Burma in 1836, till their departure to America in 1855, and the corresponding entries were identified and marked for closer scrutiny. Secondly, the matter of dating the entries had to be addressed, as some, but not *all* correspondence indicated dates. The publisher Elizabeth Brown, a descendant of the missionary couple, added her own observations and annotations alongside the excerpts from the Browns accounts. Therefore, repeated readings of the entries were necessary to

distinguish the primary sources from the publisher's own comments and observations. In many instances, the publisher's insights were useful in establishing the date and the location of events, and very often, their contexts too. Thirdly, since one of the main objectives of the thesis was to trace a pattern of missionary women's writings in Assam as travel literature, it was imperative to separate Eliza's writings from her husband's. Some entries were marked 'N.B' and some 'E.B' which was inferred to indicate the initials Nathan Brown and Eliza Brown. However, not all entries were marked such, and authorship could only be surmised based on the publisher's notes, or from the events, or perspectives suggested by the letters. For instance, Eliza would write about a child's death, or about Mr. Brown's activities in the mission fields, or about missing her friends and relatives in America.

"The Letters of Eliza Brown: Stances of Domesticity and Emancipation" places Eliza's letters within the frameworks of contemporary feminist discourses on travel writing, by engaging with the critical works of Anna Johnston, Mary Louise Pratt, and other commentators on Mission and Travel Writing. While missions, missionaries, and the conversion project has always been a murky and contested area, these are not issues I will address. Instead, my focus in this chapter is on the implications of the "domestication project," about social reformism in the Contact Zones, and also about the propping up of role models for the new converts to emulate. Domestication and Emancipation appears, at face value, to be completely contrary and uncomplementary to each other. This is not so in the Contact Zone, or at least, they are represented as being complementary ideals.

This chapter also tries to provide a generic profile of a "Helpmeet" in the days of foreign missions. The intention is not to fall into crude generalisations or brash stereotyping, but instances almost often indicate a preference for certain personalities on the part of the missionary, while choosing a wife before travelling across the oceans. The selection of a suitable wife was not a task to be taken lightly, and numerous aspects of her personality had to be taken into account. The question is, how do seemingly analogous women like Eliza Brown, or Mary Clark, or Jessie Moore, express their individual personalities through their writings? Do they conform to the widely-approved templates or do they metamorphose into prototypes in the mission fields?

Eliza Brown's accounts are important as the *first* known accounts of a missionary wife in Assam. This is why the messages of female education, social reformation and Christian

domesticity, among others that she endorsed, assumes special significance. Clearly, this spirit of mission endeavour and the focus of mission efforts on these areas would subsequently shape and define the “duties” of a helpmeet later on. Female education, Christian womanhood, the eradication of social ills, etc., would all become areas of interest for female missionaries labouring in the fields. As such, Eliza Brown was a pioneer in many ways.

### **Revisiting Mary Mead Clark**

In the third chapter, I take Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India* as my primary text. This is not the first instance that I have attempted a re-reading or a revisiting of this particular text. In my MPhil dissertation I had written a chapter on this same text, entitled “Revisiting Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India* through the Female Gaze,” a title which, I must admit speaks for itself as far as the content is concerned. My dissertation was written during a period where the significances of exploring a ‘male gaze’ or a ‘female gaze’, or even ‘gendered gazes’ was much in use in academic discourses. Scholarship proves time and again that academic standpoints are ever shifting, ever in a state of flux. Thus, I find it apt that Mary Clark’s account needs to be retrieved for another chapter in a thesis entitled “Shifting Gazes, Contesting Voices,” which not only indicates the potential of the text to be read in a variety of ways, but also firmly places the book as one of the important sources of colonial accounts on North Eastern India, Mission, Women’s Writing, and Travel Literature.

When Mary Mead Clark arrived with her husband Edward Winter Clark in Assam in March 1869, their initial task was to supervise the Mission printing press in Sibsagar, Assam. Frequent encounters with the tribes of the Naga Hills in the bazaars of Sibsagar led the Clarks to seriously contemplate taking the cross to the hills, among the ‘heathen’ tribes. After many hesitant attempts, and some skirmishes to foster something of a relationship with the Ao Nagas, Rev. Clark finally ventured up the hills with the Assamese evangelist Godhula in 1872. This was at a time when the Naga Hills were not even brought under the rule of British India. Clark was formally inducted as a missionary to the Hills in 1876, among the Ao tribe in Dekha Haimong (Molungkimong) village. Mrs. Clark would join her husband at his station in 1877, as she was away on a furlough to America. Mary Clark’s arrival as a missionary wife in Assam after Eliza Brown’s departure, firmly establishes her as a representative of the second generation of missionary wives in India’s North-Eastern region.

In order to provide continuity with Eliza Brown's letters and also to see if there is a specific pattern in the motifs, some questions are raised in the readings of *A Corner in India*. Does Mary Mead Clark assume a stance of femininity in her account, as a complementary comment on Eliza Brown's domesticity? How then, does she assert or negotiate her stances of femininity? And also, whether the enterprise of knowledge-gathering among travel writers was a gendered activity. Susan Blake talks about the question of gender and if gender as a category makes a difference in the narratives of colonization.<sup>29</sup>

Sara Mills further problematises the gender question in the genre of travel writing, by stating that the accounts of women travel writers do not fit neatly into the Orientalist Framework, since their relation to the dominant [male] discourse is complex.<sup>30</sup> This is roughly the theoretical framework, among others, on which I have presented illustrations and arguments in this chapter.

The locating of a "Contact Zone" is unavoidable while discussing events of contacts between representatives of different cultures, and Mary Clark's narrative is replete with the theme throughout. For purposes of a more coherent and systematic reading, the chapters has been divided into different stages in the episodes of Contact. For example, chapters one to four, having a commonality in thematic motifs, are clubbed together as the first stage of Contact. Ronald Inden mentions "metaphor" as a device frequently used to describe the Other, with the intent of denigrating the Other in order to elevate the self.<sup>31</sup> In Mary Clark, a constant use of metaphor in describing the natives fixes them permanently in stereotypical poses, as illustrations will show in the chapter.

Furthermore, there is a constant shift or change in the positionings of Clark in the narration, so the traditional devices of a beginning, a middle, and an end gets subverted in the telling. One gets the idea that it is the story that matters here, and not the sequence of events necessarily. But more important than this, the narratorial voice also shifts positions, at times

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<sup>29</sup> Blake, Susan L. "A Woman's Trek: What Difference does Gender make?" *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. 19-20. Print.

<sup>30</sup> Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. London: Routledge, 1993.63. Print.

<sup>31</sup> Inden, Ronald. *Imagining India*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990. 2-10. Print.

to that of a wife, and often to that of her missionary husband, whom she locates as a main protagonist. Further shifts in positionings can be noted when Clark assumes, firstly, the air of a romantic traveller, gushing about the ‘wild’ aspects of the land and its inhabitants and secondly, as an information-seeker furiously striving to map this corner of India into a lucid shape.

*A Corner in India* is, by all accounts, a quintessential travel narrative with its usual paraphernalia of colonial baggage. It frankly seeks to be a travel narrative, it employs the tools and styles available to travel writers of the time, and it speaks with the voices of authority and confidence that one would expect from such narratives. The account fulfils, in my opinion, all the requisites of a standard, generally accepted travel account. I have already mentioned my earlier engagement with the text, and about revisiting it as a *female* travelogue. I have tried to broaden the scopes now, looking at the narrative not only as *female*, but shifting, at times changing as well.

### **Reading Leaves from Jessie Traver Moore**

My fourth chapter presents a study of Jessie Moore’s journal *Further Leaves from Assam* published in 1907 which covers the period of events from 1900-1907. Jessie Moore wrote and published a set of four journals and numerous text-books for children in Assamese during the course of her association with Assam. *Further Leaves from Assam* is the second installation in the series and, besides being the representative narrative, I have selected this particular volume for a variety of reasons which will be explained later on. In the Preface to *Further Leaves*, she states that the journal was published because “missionary friends in Assam” found it “useful in looking up dates and getting a continuous outline of the work,” and to help “friends at home to get an idea of our life and work in India.”<sup>32</sup>

Jessie Moore was 22 years old when she set sail as a newly-wed with her husband Pitt Moore for missionary service to Assam in October 1876. The Moores had charge of the Nowgong

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<sup>32</sup> Moore, Mrs P. H. Preface. *Further Leaves from Assam*. Rpt. Guwahati: Spectrum, 2014. Print.

station, where they were hugely instrumental in promoting education for girls, mostly from the underprivileged sections. Mrs. Moore's journals record her husband's sermons, his tours or 'camp' duties into the interior areas during the dry seasons, punctuated by accounts of trips taken on furlough home. She left Assam for good in 1914 for reasons of health while her husband stayed back, planning to join her in a couple of years in America when he would be home on furlough. Before he could reunite with his wife, Pitt Moore passed away in Calcutta in the year 1916. The Rev. And Mrs. Moore spent nearly thirty-six years of missionary service in Nowgong, Assam. Like most of his contemporaries affiliated to various missionary societies in India, Pitt Moore was awarded the *Kaiser-i-Hind* by British India for his service. There is often a brisk professionalism in Jessie Moore's journals that differs from the impassioned letters of Eliza Brown or the amused anecdotes of Mary Clark. If, as she admits, one of the main purposes of her journals were to chronicle timelines, information and events related to mission activity, she does not exaggerate. Dates are painstakingly provided for every entry, and furthermore, her entries give glimpses of a life, if not very comfortable, at least relatively cosy and domestic with semblances of 'civilized' normalcy. The travails of Eliza's days in the forms of disastrous epidemics, loss of children to disease, violent incursions by the hill tribes are toned down, by Jessie's time, with only the occasional earthquake or incidents of cholera. The colourful skirmishes with the hill tribes from Mary Clark's accounts are noticeably missing too, in Moore's journals. All in all, life appears more settled.

Jessie was an alumna of an institute very similar in ethos and outlook as the ones endorsed by Mount Holyoke. Jessie attended school at Hamilton Female Seminary, New York and the following excerpt from her journal provides sufficient insight about the participation of Hamilton girls in the foreign mission endeavour:

...I have received a clipping from a newspaper from Hamilton, New York, which tells of the first Annual Banquet of the Hamilton Female Seminary Association, held in Hamilton on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1904. There were 146 present, and words of welcome were given, and various toasts responded to by old students of the Seminary. I received an invitation to attend the Reunion, and would like



to have been there. A Miss Bigelow, of New York, spoke on: “Our girls in the mission fields...”<sup>33</sup>

One of the striking aspects of Jessie Moore’s narrative is a consciousness of authorship, with the very negation of that authorship. For a woman who wrote a lot, not only volumes of journals, but, one might suppose, official correspondence, private letters and the text-books for children, Moore is strangely reticent about emerging to the foreground of the narrative. If she is not writing as a devoted helpmeet, she writes as a proud mother, or as a loving daughter. Gilbert and Gubar talks about the prevalence of an anxiety in female literary tradition, when it comes to asserting one’s place in the literary space.<sup>34</sup> While it would be a stretch of the imagination to fit Jessie Moore’s writings to the neurosis of nineteenth-century literary women, there is by all means a disturbingly significant absence of the writer herself. The stances of social upliftment which is radical at times are equally offset by stances of chaste womanhood and subservience. Conflicting though these ideals may seem, most missionary literature seems to recommend these contradictory approaches in the quest of perfect Christian womanhood. Patricia Hill’s coherent take on the genesis of American women’s participation in foreign missions, the economic and social status of North American women at the time, all gives an insight into the subsequent stances that came to shape mission attitudes on the subject of women’s upliftment.<sup>35</sup> The directives set down by the mission boards as a code of conduct for missionary wives to follow were especially problematic, as can be seen in *The Indian Missionary Manual* of 1864, and as I will elucidate in chapter four.

Rhonda Semple notes that letters “helped make missions real”<sup>36</sup> and so also is Jessie Moore’s stated intention in her preface. The correspondence of missionaries in the field, however, throws light on very obvious demarcations of duties on the lines of gender. This in itself is not astonishing, for the missionary enterprise is no different from any other established areas of labour or industry where gendered norms prevail. If Jessie Moore’s persona is reticent and fades behind the bulk of the gendered duties that falls to her lot, her narrative is in no way insignificant, for there is a story even in the silence. Thus, this chapter also tries to recover the routine, everyday lived experiences of missionary wives in the fields, not to embellish or

<sup>33</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 105.

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert, Sandra M and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000. Print.

<sup>35</sup> Hill.

<sup>36</sup> Semple, Rhonda Ann. *Missionary Women: Gender, Professionalism and the Victorian Idea of Christian Mission*. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003. Print.

lionize such accounts, but to acknowledge and retrieve such spaces as valid spaces of contestations.

### **Suffering for the Cross**

The sufferings of missionary wives in the field attested to the self-sacrificing ethos of missionary service. Accounts of their sufferings moved hearts and opened purses in their home countries. It is generally seen that travails of a missionary such as arrest, imprisonment, starvation, disease, near-death experiences, and premature deaths are all highly satisfactory ingredients in the romance narratives of missions. As Merriam wrote of Ann Judson, "...so passed away one of the genuine heroines of earth..."<sup>37</sup>

Jessie Moore in her journals does not betray any outward veneration for the women who have gone before her such as Ann Judson, but Eliza Brown and Mary Clark acknowledge their predecessors. For instance, on her first voyage out from Boston to Burma, Eliza's letter of June 1833 says of Ann Judson:

...we have at least come to anchor off the coast of Amherst, about twenty-seven miles from Moulmein. How I wish I could go on shore and visit the Hopia tree, under which sleep the ashes of that dear saint, Mrs. Judson. It is very near...<sup>38</sup>

Mary Clark too refers to Emily Judson the third and last wife of Adoniram Judson, perhaps as a way of drawing strength from her travails, while describing the inconveniences brought about by the rainy season in the Naga Hills:

...Foggy, lonely days, there were at times; weeks and weeks of these in the long season of drizzling rain and drifting fog, driving through our mat walls, when our open fire on the hearth failed to keep us dry. "Oh, the mould! How it gathers on the walls! Would it were only on the walls!" wrote Emily Judson...<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Merriam. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Brown. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Clark. 73.

The stories of Newell and Judson present a conundrum surely, for they show an inconsistency in mission historiography. On the one hand, mission history represents the trials and tribulations faced by the first wives as the stuff of legends, to such an extent that it becomes impossible to differentiate between reality, fiction and hearsay. On the other hand, the lionizing of Harriet Newell and Ann Judson makes us question the relative obscurity of their successors, a great many number of women, who also made a great many number of sacrifices, and left behind memoirs, diaries, journals and other written accounts. Where are these voices?

Perhaps the reason for this inconsistency can be aptly summed up in Cayton's words:

...Harriet Atwood Newell, the first of this group [the first batch of missionaries from America to Calcutta in 1812] to die, never actually laboured in the Lord's vineyard. But she was a woman, and she lived at a time when women had become a major American audience for missionary news. That fact was not lost on missionary promoters...<sup>40</sup>

The successors were not needed for the promotion of missionary activities.

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<sup>40</sup> Cayton. 76.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LETTERS OF ELIZA BROWN: STANCES OF DOMESTICITY AND EMANCIPATION

This chapter will engage with the letters of Eliza Brown, placing them within the existing frameworks of contemporary feminist discourses on travel writing. Anna Johnston suggests that, “the kinds of social relations and ideologies imbedded in missionary texts introduced a concentration on gender and domesticity facilitating both moral allegorisation of imperial intervention and confrontation with British culture and its assumptions about femininity, masculinity and domestic relations.”<sup>41</sup> Perspectives reflected in the letters, diaries, journals or memoirs written by the women missionaries in Assam invariably assume complex attitudes, leading to the emergence of some particular ways of seeing. Their situations as helpmeets to their husbands, the conventional expectations of their home societies and their roles in the mission fields as emancipators lead to several ambiguities in their accounts.

Talking about the revealing nature of correspondence written by missionary wives Mani Chawla Singh mentions that, their letters span a wide range of experiences such as losing newborn babies to fevers, to the task of catering to a family with a western palate in vastly different local conditions. Thus, their personal narratives and letters have a vividness of description and wealth of detail that make them more revealing as sources compared to the more formal, structured kind written by male missionary.<sup>42</sup>

#### Counterfoils in the Contact Zone

The question arises as to whether the Assam experience was an articulation of emancipation, or if it was set up merely as a counterfoil to idealise a western, and therefore civilized culture to the rest of Assam. A particular way of seeing has been prevalent in missionary narratives, an essentially male construction of mission historiography. Such tropes are evident in the obvious gendering of spaces in mission work in the “contact zones,” the segregation of tasks between the male missionary and his female helpmeet. This takes us to the question of

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<sup>41</sup> Johnston, Anna. *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2003.3. Print.

<sup>42</sup> Singh. 80.

gendering of spaces and in what forms manifest within the narratives of female missionaries. The hegemony in production of knowledge was traditionally considered to be a male domain in colonial discourses, but considering the zeal of social reformism propagated by the women missionaries, especially with regard to the “woman question,” it becomes necessary to explore to what extent they were participants in the knowledge gathering and dissemination processes.

Missionary experiences are marked by unceasing correspondence and literature in the forms of private letters and journals. There are two constraints which limits the scope of such correspondence, numerous as they may be. First is a constraint on the texts themselves, as these letters and journals were most of the time not intended for commercial publications. The letters in such cases are highly loaded, emotional, censored, or rife with mission parlance for the benefit of the home mission board, friends and family. The second is the constraint on publication, since the accounts were again intended for a targeted readership of future young recruits to the fields, mostly students in Bible colleges. The other targeted readers were also possible future individual sponsors of foreign missions and the home mission board.

Eliza Brown’s collected writings were part of the posthumous publication in 1890 by Elizabeth Wibberley Brown, titled *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and other Labors of Nathan Brown*, currently out of print and available on the web archives. It is a book about Eliza’s husband Nathan Brown, as the title suggests, detailing his mission work in Burma, Assam and till his demise in Japan. However, Eliza Brown’s contributions in the volume carries immense value and insight, her entries distinguished from her husband’s ‘N.B’ by her initials ‘E.B,’ offering perspectives about their lives in Burma and Assam. The explanatory note by the publisher at the beginning of the book says:

...Packets of letters from the East India mail of fifty years ago, have furnished some pages of the accompanying record...the gaps in these fast-vanishing traces are partially filled from family traditions; out of later correspondence and occasional brief diaries, an outline of the remaining years has been compiled, and a few descriptive settings of the narrative are based upon other reading, and

memory...facts have also been obtained and extracts made from letters found in back volumes of the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*...<sup>43</sup>

The Browns were the first missionary couple to land in Assam on 1836 following an invitation to the American Baptist Mission from the then Commissioner-General of Assam, Major Francis Jenkins. They were accompanied by the Cutters, whose responsibility in the mission field was to oversee the printing press. As such, Eliza Brown's experience is valuable as an account of the first missionary wife in Assam, and she is thus, a pioneer in every sense. Her voice is also valuable as it engages the reader with a whole set of ideas and belief systems proposed by the mission enterprise.

With regard to the missionary narratives and their role in the imperial project of civilising the heathen, it is necessary to understand their complex positions in the discourse. Anna Johnston comments on the enormous production of texts by British protestant missionaries in the form of diaries, reports, letters, memoirs, histories, ethnographies, novels, children's books, translations, grammars and many more kinds of texts. They were prolific writers whose works were 'characterised by authorship as much as by daring deeds in foreign climes.'<sup>44</sup> The missionaries in Assam were also active writers, producing a profuse collection of translations, text books, memoirs, reports and all sorts of literature. Johnston mentions an 'imperial archive' in the nineteenth century, a vast expansion of archives filled with information about the world outside Britain. The missionary texts, she says, were a foundational and influential part of this imperial archive, proving that questions of history and identity under colonial conditions are much more complex than neat bifurcation of identities as either colonised or colonising. As such, they are crucial to understanding cross-cultural encounters under the aegis of empire.<sup>45</sup>

### **Profiling a Helpmeet**

Imperial narratives of evangelical activity may revolve around the heroic male missionary figure, but the missionary women were also seen to play a crucial, if secondary role. According to Johnston, missionary women were the *only* Protestant missionary women

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<sup>43</sup> Brown. Explanatory Note. iii.

<sup>44</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*.

during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as missionary societies refused to employ single women until after the middle of the nineteenth century. She adds that the assumed harshness and potential danger of colonial environments was seen as a threat to the Englishwoman overseas, and the self-sacrificing nature of mission work enhanced the appeal of the missionary wife to a public eager for accounts of life on the frontier.<sup>46</sup> It cannot be denied that the missionary project was male-controlled until the 1870s, when women's recruitment as independent missionaries began to disrupt the gendered paradigm.<sup>47</sup> However, women's accounts play an undeniable part in the construction of mission historiography, even if categorised as silent workers and appendages to their husbands.

One qualification required of every young missionary sent out to the distant fields by the missionary societies in North America was a marriage certificate. The young missionary recruit would be expected to sail with his bride as the proverbial helpmeet, a woman of the "right spirit," as John Murdoch emphasises in *The Indian Missionary Manual*. The question of a suitable wife was by no means to be taken lightly as the writer warns:

...the pious man who marries a worldly woman places himself in a condition of great danger. Woe betide him whose foes are of his own house. The peril, however, is much greater in a heathen country, where perhaps, the Missionary's wife is the only one from whom consolation and encouragement can be expected. Still, there have been a few instances in which Missionaries have followed the sad precedent, "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" ...<sup>48</sup>

He goes on to explain in very unambiguous terms why a match formed on the basis of worldly attractions would be disastrous for the missionary:

...it has often been remarked, that when either husband or wife, both being before worldly, is converted, in many cases the other is impressed. Not so, however, in the great majority of cases, when a professor of religion marries a person who is not pious. Then the reverse process usually takes place — the

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<sup>46</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> Singh. 43.

<sup>48</sup> Murdoch, John. *The Indian Missionary Manual: or, Hints to Young Missionaries in India. With Lists of Books*. Madras, 1864. 379-80. Web.

former is assimilated to the latter. The Missionary who chooses a worldly partner, in general, either discharges his duties in a very perfunctory manner, or soon retires from the field...<sup>49</sup>

The writing on the wall seems to suggest that the missionary should not only select a good Christian wife with care, but also appears to convey a caution that the missionary must avoid the temptations of worldly pleasures in *any* form he might encounter in his mission field. Such directives are typical, for it is a well-established fact that missionary societies were increasingly wary of their young recruits succumbing to the lure of the flesh of native women. In “Women and Cultural Exchanges,” Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock too notes that, “the perceived need of male missionaries for companionship and domestic support, together with underlying fears of sexual misconduct, quickly made the wife a necessary asset...”<sup>50</sup>

Sarah Johnson presents a compelling perspective about missionaries and their fear of temptations in ‘paradise’ in “Missionary Positions: Romantic European Polynesias from Cook to Stevenson”. She writes that to the missionaries who went to proselytise in Tahiti, the intrinsic nature of man was in a ‘fallen’ state and therefore there could be no earthly paradise free from sin. Men of austere religions, they were “suspicious of the sensory (and sensual) pleasures by which dreamers had traditionally identified paradises.” She further adds that, to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century visitors including explorers and missionaries, the islanders could not be solely blamed for Tahiti’s fallen state, because “sex without shame had, by the late eighteenth century, become a given of paradises...” Johnson mentions the missionary William Ellis, who was “ever-conscious of sin’s presence” that he had to restrain feelings of aesthetic pleasure at the Tahitian scenery. Ellis’ apprehensions about giving in to his imaginative fancies were all too suggestive of sinful indulging in sensual pleasures, as Johnson notes:

...such fancies, if indulged, would be impious...and so imagination must be restrained. Other urges too had to be checked: to unmarried missionaries’ dalliance with ‘heathen’ girls was not the opportunity relished by sailors but a

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<sup>49</sup> Murdoch. 80.

<sup>50</sup> Grimshaw, Patricia and Peter Sherlock. “Women and Cultural Exchanges.” *Missions and Empire*. Ed. Norman Etherington. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. 181. Print.



dread temptation. One of the early brethren was expelled for marrying an unconverted Tahitian...<sup>51</sup>

Apart from these implications, the necessity of a wife evidently foregrounds the influence of women in the mission field. Anna Johnston says that evangelical wives were integral to the success of missions, and that they bore the joint responsibilities of representing British and religious femininity. Few missionaries were allowed to leave for the field without wives, leading to a culture of quickly arranged, swiftly formalised marriages among religious couples.<sup>52</sup> Johnston's comments are about the practices of the London Missionary Society, but the same is seen to apply in the case of the American Baptist missionaries. Though the missionary wife was considered only as an appendage, an unpaid helpmeet and could be sent back to the home country if widowed in the field, the necessity of her presence to the missionary project cannot be underestimated. The basic but pertinent questions to ask at this point would be; who were these women? Were they representative of western women? What sort of cultural backgrounds did they come from?

Such women were generally from small town, middle-class families and almost all had modest post-secondary education. Many had trained as teachers, nurses, or physicians. The missionary women in North India were usually engaged in four spheres of activity – education, providing western medical care to women and girls, Zenana visitations, and lastly, itinerant evangelism.<sup>53</sup>

A paper presented during the Jubilee conference of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union in December 1886, by the missionary wife Mrs. E. G. Phillips entitled, “The Work for Missionary Wives” is clearly a representative treatise on the responsibilities of missionary wives. As the title suggests, the paper contains a set of definitions and roles expected of wives in the mission field. Mrs Phillips puts forward that, “zeal in mission work is a needful characteristic, but other characteristics are also necessary”. Here she quotes a “medical missionary in Japan”:

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<sup>51</sup> Johnson, Sarah. “Missionary Positions: Romantic European Polynesians from Cook to Stevenson”. *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Tim Youngs. London: Anthem, 2006. 182-199. Print

<sup>52</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Singh. 193-94.

...he also says with reference to women that, “if the applicant were a lady, my first question would be, could she make *good bread*, cook a good roast of beef, and get a good dinner. Whether she was so familiar with culinary work that it was a drudge and duty, or a pleasure and a delight.” “not a few” he says, “have failed from lack of these qualifications”...<sup>54</sup>

Apart from these domestic duties, the missionary wife is urged to be a repository of moral and self-sacrificial values too. Along with a list of numerous desirable characteristics, she should possess a “missionary spirit,” and should not be a drawback to her husband:

...Although these duties devolving upon us as wives do, in a measure, debar us from engaging in direct mission work, let us not look upon these as “narrow family cares that chain us down,” but rather consider them as well worthy our time and attention, being duties imposed upon us by Him who rules the universe, and has assigned to women the position of helpmeet. We may not become *prominent* workers in the mission field...will he not reward us, though our works be insignificant in the sight of man...<sup>55</sup>

### **American Women and Overseas Missions**

Overseas travel to distant lands in the form of missionary enterprise provided the American woman in the late nineteenth-century an opportunity for romance and adventure in unknown parts. Leslie A. Flemming tries to find a historical and cultural reason that led to the involvement of American women in mission work. He states that the distinctive feature of the American mission enterprise was the heavy involvement of women which was a result of the Student Volunteer Movement that began recruiting college-age women and men into overseas mission service in 1887. Graduates of the Moody Bible Institute or similar mission-oriented training institutes, they found in mission work a wider range of permissible activities than was then available in most American churches. They were also, at the same time, convinced of the need for missions to accomplish social change. Flemming further adds that these women, strongly influenced by the “cult of domesticity” involved in mission work

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<sup>54</sup> Phillips, Mrs. E. G. “The Work for Missionary Wives”. *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*. Rpt. The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union. Delhi: Spectrum. 1992. 208. Print.

<sup>55</sup> Phillips. 209.

either as supporters in the United States or as overseas missionaries, with the belief that as women, they occupied an exalted position in American culture. They attributed their exalted position to Christianity and constructed women in the cultures of Asia and the Middle East as downtrodden and oppressed by their traditional religions.<sup>56</sup>

Mani Chawla Singh says that a missionary wife embarking on an overseas journey was positioned very differently from her husband who was the designated representative of his missionary societies. Starting on their voyages very soon after their marriages, bearing and raising children in “distant lands,” their marriages to overseas missionaries marked turning points in their lives. Their limited exposure and education at home hardly equipped them for the cultural displacement and new roles and responsibilities. Classified as a “family dependant” a woman assumed obligations beyond normal expectations in married life in the home society. Bound by the gendered role as helpmeet she was not only expected to shoulder the domestic duties of a wife but the religious duties of an evangelist as well. As wives, missionary workers, and as women, they inhabited arenas of shifting relationships of power and dependency.<sup>57</sup> She also talks about the civilising influence of a ‘mission compound’ against ‘heathenism’ and creating a Christian microcosm in the midst of “native wilderness.”<sup>58</sup> No doubt the role of helpmeet required a wife to create and maintain this ideal image of domesticity. The presence of missionary wives in the field served to provide a set of western ideals, upheld as ‘civilised’ and therefore desirable for the native community.

### **Eliza Ballard Brown: Early Years, Burma and Assam**

In *Imperial Eyes* Marie Louise Pratt talks about Contact Zones in colonial spaces and the phenomenon of transculturation, which is a result of the Contact Zones. Pratt’s Contact Zones are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths...”<sup>59</sup> The ambiguous idea of women’s emancipation proposed by the American Baptists in Assam in the nineteenth century illustrates that this attractive idea of emancipation for women was with a lot of restrictive limitations, and that the idea of

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<sup>56</sup> Flemming, Leslie A. “A New Humanity: American Missionaries’ Ideals for Women in north India, 1870-1930” *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. 191-2. Print.

<sup>57</sup> Singh. 79-80.

<sup>58</sup> Singh. 51.

<sup>59</sup> Pratt, Marie Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992. 4. Print.

emancipation was, in fact, in collusion with the ideologies of empire along with other implications for creating better subjects. Moreover, the image of native Christian femininity that emerges as a by-product of these discourses falls within, and is, a result of the contact zone.

In addition, the imposition of values, culture and religion worked not only with the omnipotent might of western powers but also with the active participation of the natives. As Pratt puts it, transculturation is a phenomenon of the Contact Zone, a process that shows “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.”<sup>60</sup> The collected letters of Eliza Brown, written to friends and relatives in America during her stay in Assam in the years 1835-1855 sheds valuable insight as a document that exemplifies the process of transculturation in a Contact Zone and the subsequent aftermath. Apart from this, Eliza Brown’s narrative is interesting in terms of novelty, as the account of the first missionary wife in Assam, a pioneering figure among future missionary wives. Another reason for the value of her narrative is its posthumous publication, not in a separate volume by itself but as an appendage to the narrative of her husband, the missionary Nathan Brown. Thus, not only in life, but also in the text, the experiences of Eliza Brown survive as a supplement to that of her husband, in an ironical stance of the “helpmeet.”

Due to the lack of existing accounts of her life, it is not possible to provide accurate and proper biographical details of Mrs. Brown. The only viable and available source of her early life in America is from the published letters, with added remarks by the publisher.<sup>61</sup> Eliza Ballard, born on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1807, was the youngest child of a family of eleven children from Charlemont, Massachusetts. Her relative E. W. Brown gives a happy and carefree picture of her childhood, growing up “near to nature’s heart” before the “resonant stream-eagles,” “queen of her father’s heart” and “the pet of her eight brothers.” At fourteen, she was sent to Farmingham to attend the academy and when she returned home after her education, she “possessed a frank sociableness” that made her “good company in any circle.” Buckland, the Birthplace of Mary Lyon, the American pioneer in women’s education was just along the

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<sup>60</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Brown. 35- 8.

river from East Charlemont, and Eliza Ballard attended Sanderson Academy during 1826-7. She was one of the fifty pupils that term who listened to Mary Lyon's daily lectures, learning the "monitorial system" which she would introduce into her methods as a teacher thereafter. In 1828 Eliza was a teacher at a seminary in Bennington, having charge of the girls' department for the next two years. The prospectus of the seminary announced its aim as "not so much to teach the pupils what others have thought, as to train them to think them for themselves. The course included "scientific and literary branches pursued in colleges at that time," with Bible study on Saturday evenings and on the Sabbath. "Moral training, on the New England pattern, lay at the foundation of the work done, and the fervent religious spirit emanating from the young principals, gave its tone to the institution."<sup>62</sup>

Eliza Ballard married Nathan Brown, a friend and contemporary of her brother James Ballard on May 1830. As a young man, Nathan Brown had been deeply influenced by letters and news from Adoniram Judson, the American Baptist missionary in Burma. Judson's appeals for missionaries to the East in the article "The Missionary's Call" published in the *Missionary Magazine* hugely motivated the newly married Browns who applied to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Affairs in August 1830 and were promptly approved to join the Judsons in the Burmese Baptist mission. The later intervention of the British Empire, its change in stance regarding the Christianizing mission of the natives and its subsequent support for church and education would see Eliza and Nathan Brown with their two children setting up the first Assam mission in 1836. They were accompanied by another missionary couple, Mr and Mrs O. B. Cutter, who were in charge of printing and publication of mission related tracts and literature. Mrs. Brown was not the first and only missionary wife in Assam at the time, but the availability of her letters on the internet archives highlights her experiences and renders her more accessible than her contemporaries to readers today.

### **A Pioneer in the Contact Zone**

When she landed in Assam in 1836, Eliza Brown was very much conscious of her path-breaking role as pioneer of a new enterprise. Her letter home tells of the scarcity of warmth and comfort in the wild environment of Sadiya, the mission station in Assam, "for lack of better appliances, during the first cold season, a box filled with earth, held the fire in the

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<sup>62</sup> Brown. 35.

children's living room..."<sup>63</sup> Repeated experimentations to install a smokeless chimney in the house end in failure and she is content that:

...if we fail...others who follow, will have the benefit of our experience. We were pioneers here, and we must be pioneers in everything is done for the present...<sup>64</sup>

Eliza Brown's social reformism was strongly inspired by the life and achievements of her compatriot Mary Lyon. Like many young American women of her time and circumstances, Eliza believed that she had a philanthropic mission to perform in the heathen world. Her duties were to spread the gospel, to better the lives of savages and bring them closer to Christ, and to teach civilised manners to the uncivilised. Reading the memoir of Mary Lyon, she wrote to a relative:

...The contemplation of her character has made me feel such stirring of soul that I want to begin anew like a child, and live my life over again...*there is nothing in the universe that I fear but that I shall not know all my duty, or shall fail to do it...*<sup>65</sup>

Eliza professes herself to be a disciple of Mary Lyon which shows that she was consciously drawing a parallel between her own experiences to that of the pioneer. Her acknowledgement of her "duty" immediately trivialises the discourse of women's emancipation, since the two notions cannot be synonymous to each other. Hence, most of the missionary wives found themselves in unique situations of contradictory discourses, and readings of their accounts indeed do reveal these conflicts.

### **Woman on Duty: Saving Assam in America 1847-9**

One of the most pertinent examples of western women championing for the cause of eastern women can be seen in the instance when Eliza Brown travels to America in a quest to garner more support for the Assam mission. By 1847, during the initial years of their mission, the

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<sup>63</sup> Brown. 132.

<sup>64</sup> Brown. 132-3.

<sup>65</sup> Brown. 386.

Browns had lost three children to disease and sickness in Burma and Assam. The Assam mission was making slow progress, and it was difficult to win over the natives who were so deeply entrenched in Hinduism and Islam. The years were marked by such desperation and loss of health that the Browns were forced to consider if “Assam be one of the first positions to be relinquished.” In response to letters from America urging them to leave the Assam mission, Nathan Brown wrote, “the call to return, is one which we could never obey so long as life and a moderate share of health is granted us.”

In 1846 it was decided that Eliza would travel to America with their two remaining children and appeal to the missionary union not to abandon the Assam mission. She would, in fact, campaign for more missionaries to Assam organising meetings at places such as Massachusetts, Vermont, Boston, Detroit, Milwaukee etc., asking the churches “beloved brethren, must I go back alone...?”<sup>66</sup> A most effective and ingenious effort at winning support for the Assam mission was a mime of an Assamese beggar woman performed by Eliza during meetings of the ladies’ sewing circles. She would wrap herself in a long shawl and make profound salaams:

...raising her hand to her forehead, and bending low...talking all the while in a softly flowing foreign language...at length the tone changed to one of pathetic entreaty...finally the Assamese beggar rose, and retired backwards with profound obeisances, and presently Mrs. Brown resumed her place in the circle. The ladies assured her that no written description of eastern customs had ever given them half so vivid an idea as her impersonation...<sup>67</sup>

Needless to say, Eliza’s errand to America was a success and resulted in the addition of two more missionary families to Assam. Her accounts of the despondency at Assam move her audience to tears and many pledge their support, weeping that “sister Brown must not go back alone.” She writes an optimistic letter to her husband in Assam, “...thus you see, dearest, the sum – all extra – is likely to be pledged in this convention for the support of an associate for you. And now I shall give myself no rest till I find the *man*.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Brown. 269-94.

<sup>67</sup> Brown. 296-7.

<sup>68</sup> Brown. 294.

### Domesticating the Emancipated: Conflicting Vantage Points

Borrowing the term “cult of domesticity” from Leslie A. Flemming,<sup>69</sup> I would like to propose at this point the idea that the missionary wife occupied a space/s of complex vantage points, since she was in a process of numerous other negotiations at the same time. She was supposed to be an embodiment of the conventional discourses of femininity at home (North America), and yet be a harbinger of the discourse of emancipation to the native woman in Assam. Here, the very notions of emancipation and upliftment conversant with the progress of women’s movements in Europe and America of the nineteenth century deserve a more serious perusal in the context of women’s mission historiography. The mission enterprise appears in an ambiguous light, especially considering issues of female education and notions of femininity. Emancipation of the native woman in this case is contestable, since it seems to imply emancipation *only* from native customs thereby leading to an internalization of rigid western models of domesticity and femininity. It is an event that provides for the collusion of western ideas of femininity with the colonial idea of the civilizing mission, but as equally restrictive for the native woman. It also gives rise to questions about the participation of the American Baptists in the importation and imposing of *acceptable* and *definable* sets of values and cultural constructions.

Her early letters are full of optimism and hope, so typical of missionary literature, a conviction that things will get better somehow:

...If we can preserve our health, and ere long be the means of elevating some of the poor heathen around us, from this dreadful misery and darkness, we shall through eternity have cause for rejoicing that the Lord sent us here...<sup>70</sup>

The construction of eastern women as helpless beings needing redemption in temporal as well as spiritual matters is an essential hypothesis of missionary narratives. The mission accounts of women and their contributions exemplify the implications of western women’s participation in the mission enterprise. Anna Johnston suggests that a discourse of gender was central to the ethos of evangelical Protestantism. The evangelicals worked on the premise that while Christianity sustained a high status for women, the place of women in pagan societies

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<sup>69</sup> Flemming. 191-205.

<sup>70</sup> Brown. 134.



was deeply degraded. Though women in the mission field were sent only as the wives of the appointed missionaries, their work was essential to the success of the individual missions. Apart from their invaluable task of communicating with and converting the native women, their presence in the mission field also provided images of family which were crucial to the work of colonial missions.<sup>71</sup>

One of Eliza's first encounters with mission work comes in the form of a runaway slave girl who "begged" to be saved:

...A little slave-girl, who had run away from her cruel master, came to me the other day, and begged for a home. I felt the want of a little girl to do many things for me, and she seemed such an object of pity, I took her, and shall keep her as long as she is a good girl and wishes to stay with me. Her name is Louburi...<sup>72</sup>

For Indira Ghose, "the degraded Indian woman" was a new sphere of activity for colonial female reformers. She says that "at a time when British rule in India increasingly legitimized its presence in the name of its mission to bring the light of civilization to the unenlightened masses of the East, women social reformers linked their cause to that of the empire."<sup>73</sup> The tenacity of the Eastern-woman-as-victim trope, Ghose adds, is not only a characteristic of feminist discourse, but is discernible in a wide spectrum of writings. Such texts tend to hint darkly at all the horrors associated with the east such as child sacrifice, mutilation, ignorance and superstition.<sup>74</sup> Though Ghose identifies this reformist zeal as a new phase particularly active in the wake of the Mutiny in 1857, the trend can be clearly discerned as early as in 1838 during Eliza Brown's early years in the Assam mission.

### **Heathen Grief and Christian Grief: Teaching them How to Cry**

Apart from the story of Louburi the slave girl's rescue, Eliza's letters are full of other such liberations of downtrodden girls and unfortunate women by the mission. The strangest

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<sup>71</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 39.

<sup>72</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*.

<sup>73</sup> Ghose, Indira. *Women Travellers in Colonial India: the Power of the Female Gaze*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1998. 110. Print.

<sup>74</sup> Ghose. 112.

situations present themselves to the unceasing Eliza to spread the gospel among the natives. When Batiram, a newly converted native Christian passed away, his widowed Hindu mother, “an emaciated old woman, whose face gave evidence of a marked and determined character” is prostrate with grief. Her wailings are wild and raw, very different from the dignified grief of the other Christian mourners. Eliza provides a picturesque and colourful account of the widow mourning for her son in a crazed manner:

...Attired in soiled and scanty raiment, her whitened locks dishevelled, walking to and fro about the grounds, alternately shrieking, howling and beating her breast with her hands, often prostrating herself and beating the earth, calling upon her heathen gods to give back to her her son—she bore all the appearance of a maniac. At length rushing through the crowd into the veranda, and laying her tawny shrivelled hand upon his brow, she burst forth with a shrill, unearthly voice, in the most pathetic ejaculatory strains, intermingled with howling and wailing, addressing herself alternately to the departed spirit of her son and to the gods...<sup>75</sup>

The missionary wife tries to comfort the grieving mother, reminding her that her son has “gone to be with Jesus, where he is far happier than he ever was in this life.” The sorrow of the bereaved mother is dismissed and instead she is reprimanded by Eliza for seeking solace from her heathen gods. She sees this event as an opportunity to gather the widow into the fold of Christianity, telling her:

...forsake your idol worship, and cease to trust in heathen gods, who cannot hear or answer your prayers, and to listen to the words of the missionary teachers, and learn about the true God, who alone has the power to wash away your sins and make you happy after death...come to my house tomorrow, and I will teach you what the true shasters say about heaven, the abode of all the good, and where your dear son has gone...<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Brown. 361.

<sup>76</sup> Brown. 362.

Needless to say, Batiram's mother start attending the weekly women's meeting and it is a turning-point in her conversion. She prays with the Christians, gets baptized, and her tale ends on a happy note full of promise:

...it was the first time she ever prayed before any *human* being... her prayer today was simple and childlike, like that of a new beginner... 'the Lord has taken my own dear son—the will of the Lord be done. Have mercy upon me, a poor sinner, and fit me to join him in heaven. Have mercy upon my step-son and my two daughters, who are in total darkness...' <sup>77</sup>

The tasks of conducting the “women's meeting,” visiting the Zenana and educating girls and women were the sole responsibility of Mrs. Brown. She meets with encouraging signs among the female natives from time to time, showing that the hopeless sinners can be saved yet. In one letter Eliza writes about a women's meeting:

...To-day one after another confessed with weeping and distress some old sins long hidden. Mr. Brown has lately been preaching a course of sermons on the commandments. They seem to have set consciences at work, searching out old sins of lying, stealing, deception, etc., and the working has brought forth voluntary confessions of sins which had hindered them and blinded their minds... <sup>78</sup>

It is very strange that the wailing grief of Batiram's grieving mother stands for every undesirable and undignified heathen characteristic whereas the “weeping and distress” of the Christianized guilt-stricken sinners are perfectly acceptable and even encouraged.

### **Mission Methodology: Assam Wives American Style**

A very specific methodology was followed by the missionaries which can be summarised as a careful step- by- step process, culminating in the “renewal” of the sinful heathen convert to a noble being with vast potential for improvement and hence, redemption. First would be the “rescue” of orphans, slaves and widows and other unfortunates. This would be followed by

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<sup>77</sup> Brown. 363.

<sup>78</sup> Brown. 334.

classroom teaching of the ABC's, the scriptures, personal hygiene, housekeeping and other practical skills. The next inevitable steps include the processes of women's prayer meetings, conversion and finally baptism. The completion of this cycle would make the pupils eligible for matrimony with other eligible/potential converts. Not surprisingly, missionary narratives are full of successful marriage unions between native converts. Widows would also remarry under the patronage of the mission if still of marriageable age. Older widows would be trained as wardens or teachers for the mission schools. Their work was daunting and hopeless sometimes in this "heart of Asia far removed from every trace of civilization, education, or Christianity, surrounded by heathen who are given to lying, theft, opium-smoking..."<sup>79</sup> But the call of duty is strong for the missionaries in heathen Assam who are:

...everything wicked, rude and unlovely, who are without any conception of the object for which you came among them, and you can perhaps form some idea of the situation...sympathize with us in all our trials, pray for us, and often speak encouraging words to urge us onward in the path of duty...<sup>80</sup>

Flemming adds that missionary women in India articulated certain values in the areas of women's status, caste relations, and physical well-being. These were values they wished to make operative in Indian society for all women, irrespective of community identity. In addition to these, however, missionaries also articulated a set of values that applied chiefly to Christian women. They included traditional values such as "they should be truthful, gentle, loving, patient, trusting, quiet, orderly, and unselfishly devoted to their husbands and children."<sup>81</sup> In addition, Flemming says that while seemingly unaware of the parallels with their own lives, missionaries also frequently criticized Indian women's subordination to male family members, their lack of physical freedom, their economic dependence, etc. Even highly educated single women missionaries, whose work helped provide new options for Indian women, accepted the domestic role as the primary one for women. Most of the missionaries wanted to create "useful" women, which typically meant having an enhanced domestic role similar to that ideally prescribed for middle-class American women.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Brown. 140.

<sup>80</sup> Brown.

<sup>81</sup> Flemming. 199-203.

<sup>82</sup> Brown. 195-200.

### **Transculturation in the Zone: Rescuing the Perishing**

The mission compound was also a desirable destination for social outcasts and homeless orphans, offering them a means of survival. Mrs. Brown adopts the child of a Bengali sepoy, who had died leaving behind a young widow. The widow was the daughter of a Brahmin, “one of the most distinguished pundits in the country.” After the death of her husband, the widow remarried:

...By this act she incensed her father and other relations, and was driven from their doors an outcaste...having high aspirations for her daughter, and seeing the elevated position of the native Christian women here, she was induced to give up her child to be educated in the school...<sup>83</sup>

She writes of another incident where she had to turn a widow away because indifferent health would not allow her to take on more pupils in the school:

...The widow of a Brahman came a few days ago with a beautiful girl eight or nine years old, and cried to have me take her...I told her that if life was spared in the cold season I would try to make a place for her, if she would bring her then...<sup>84</sup>

Such events are clearly examples of transculturation taking place in a Contact Zone. In course of time, homeless children keep turning up at the mission compound looking for shelter. Eliza Brown goes on to adopt and educate a number of unwanted children composed of “several castes and nationalities” like “Mohammedan, Hindu, Doom, Brahman and Eurasian.” Over the course of time, the mission compound grows into a haven filled with the happy hymns of the school-girls where even the “weary heart” of an old Brahman pundit at the school “found refreshment in singing those simple Christian songs.”<sup>85</sup>

Eliza’s experimentations with adopting, educating and converting the unwanted girls is a success story. She talks exultantly about the conversions of three of the oldest girls in the

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<sup>83</sup> Brown. 373.

<sup>84</sup> Brown. 387-8.

<sup>85</sup> Brown. 374.

school: Budhi, Jogori and Kunti. Similar to the feeling of distress among the women of the “women’s meeting” group, these three new converts are encouraged to feel remorse for some “old sins long hidden” during the dark days of their heathenism. The same tears shed in remorse for past sins are different in quality, somehow nobler than the mournful expressions of loss of a loved one by a heathen:

...The circumstances of the conversions of these girls, so recently gathered in from heathenism, were deeply interesting...their distress of mind increased for some days, till eventually they expressed a hope that their prayers had been heard, and their sins forgiven...thus for some weeks our house was literally made a ‘house of prayer’ by these newly-converted heathen girls...<sup>86</sup>

Thus the missionary wife becomes a vociferous champion of the weak and helpless. Her zeal for social reformism does not stop only with intervention in the lives of orphans and widows. In a letter which she writes to her daughter in America she talks triumphantly about the success of the mission in transcending the rigid caste barriers among the converts. The baptism of a little girl of the lowest fisher caste and a Brahman widow was a “marvellous spectacle”:

...I wish you could have been here... to see the proud Bamuni with the lowly Dumuni—the highest and the lowest—both clothed with the same spirit of humility, go into the water together, and become of one caste!...<sup>87</sup>

The American women missionaries, says Flemming, perhaps because of their tacit assumption of the superiority of American culture, were seemingly unconcerned with the rigid racial segregation then common in the United States, they held up a strongly egalitarian ideal for India, looking forward to the day when caste lines would no longer divide either the Indian Christian community or Indian society as a whole. In institutions serving Indian Christians in particular, missionaries consciously strove to create groups mixed by caste and class.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Brown. 377.

<sup>87</sup> Brown. 379.

<sup>88</sup> Flemming. 196.

## Native Converts to American Domesticity

According to Flemming, conversion to Christianity was urged as a means of raising women's status. He raises several issues in this very doctrine of emancipation offered to native women by the American women missionaries. Having come to India at a time when the marriage age for women in the United States had already begun to rise, many missionary women saw the custom of early betrothal common among all religious communities in India, as the area of social life most in need of change. While rarely criticizing the institution of arranged marriage itself, missionary writers criticized Indians for bowing to social pressure in the age at which betrothal arrangements were made.<sup>89</sup>

The baptisms of the mission school girls are invariably followed by marriage ceremonies, all arranged and approved with the blessings of the mission. She writes that, "On Christmas-day Kunti Caroline Simons was married to Ramsing...Kunti behaved with perfect propriety..."<sup>90</sup> The other girls too are married off with due ceremony:

...It was very hard for me to give away Budhi...although they had corresponded for more than a year, she had never spoken to her lover previous to their marriage. This, however, I did not know till a few days before they were married, or I should have managed to have that heathenish custom broken...<sup>91</sup>

In due course of time this protégé excels as an exemplar of chaste native Christian womanhood and is a credit to her mentor. Eliza mentions with pride an event when a Colonel in the British army sees Budhi and remarks to the missionaries:

...I want no greater evidence of the power of Christianity over the heathen than this woman's life...not an angry word has been heard from her lips; in the neatness of her house, and consistency of her deportment, she has been a perfect example to her heathen neighbors, and her singing of Christian hymns has done me more good than sermons...<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Flemming. 194.

<sup>90</sup> Brown. 380.

<sup>91</sup> Brown. 388-9.

<sup>92</sup> Brown. 390.

On getting married, the mission girls continue to help increase the number of church memberships. In most cases, the girls get married to non-Christian men but potential converts. Their value as good Christian wives is measured by their influences over their husbands, the task of converting their husbands to Christianity is added onto their other domestic roles:

...Jogori came to have one of her good family talks. Her heart is brimful of joy and hope, through the recent conversion of her husband, for whom she has so long been labouring and praying...Budhi and Hubhodro have both exerted a most salutary influence over their husbands...<sup>93</sup>

For Eliza Brown, the sense of achievement she feels in the concluding years of her adventure in Assam is momentous. She is a surrogate mother, mentor, teacher and religious guide for the mission girls. She has succeeded in rescuing, educating and indoctrinating a set of girls into a socially acceptable American-style of feminine domesticity. In 1854 September, the penultimate year of the Browns departure to America, this time for good, she surveys with evident pride and satisfaction the results of her labours and creation:

...lovely girls – may they prove true lambs of the Saviour’s flock! These girls and women married from the school, are very dear to my heart. Having had the whole charge and care of them for so long, they look up to me as to a mother, and they are as dear to me as any adopted children can be...<sup>94</sup>

With increasing attacks of sickness and failing health, the Browns were faced with the prospect of abandoning Assam. Eliza wrote, “We begin to think seriously of leaving Assam and returning to America for the restoration of our health. My heart shrinks from the trial of leaving my dear school and prayer-meeting...”<sup>95</sup> The monitorial system which was an integral part of her early education and a legacy of the Lyon system proves to be an effective method for the girl’s school. Eliza can now look forward to going home as she has full confidence in her capable girls, “...the monitors bear nearly all the burdens...”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Brown. 423.

<sup>94</sup> Brown. 429.

<sup>95</sup> Brown.

<sup>96</sup> Brown.



After a period of 22 years in Assam, broken only by a single furlough of one year to America, Eliza and Nathan Brown left the Assam mission in 1855.

### **The Curse of the Apple**

Anna Johnston questions the notion of upholding women as ‘more spiritual’ than men, a trait especially prevalent in evangelical discourses of the time. She says that, “discourses surrounding femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries imbued women with the moral authority of the modern nation, particularly those involved in the evangelical Protestant churches. The ideal Christian woman was seen to embody both traditional morality *and* progressive modernity.” Johnston suggests that such kinds of ‘doubled time’ discourses were profoundly important to missionary efforts to promote evangelical gender relations in colonial cultures. Missionaries could represent their gendered interventions as restoring a natural, Edenic state of relations between the sexes as well as introducing social relations characteristic of modern, Christian nations.<sup>97</sup>

The women missionaries of the Assam Baptist mission encouraged the construction of a very specific type of womanhood. In common Christian and western parlance the very image of womanhood was deemed to be imbued with an innate sin, the assumption of this burden of impurity was as old as the story of the Fall, with its origin in the event of the Fall itself. One way for women to redeem themselves was to be crusaders of the gospel and the onus of this burden, especially the task of saving the native heathen woman was regarded as the exclusive duty of the western women, who were already ‘saved’ from this ‘curse’ by their religion. This is clearly articulated by Miss Ornell Keeler, a missionary to Assam in her paper “Woman’s Work among the Assamese” in the *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference*:

...From the time woman plucked the apple from the forbidden tree and gave to her husband to eat, the curse has rested heavily upon her. She has gone down, down into the depths of sin and ignorance, until she has been despised and counted a degraded being. Nowhere is this more clearly seen and felt than in heathen lands. In all of these false systems of religion...there is nothing which

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<sup>97</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 45.

can restore or elevate her to her former state... Christianity alone has the vital power...<sup>98</sup>

Johnston asserts that throughout evangelical texts from various fields of mission activity, there is a recurrence of the trope of missionary woman as role model and as a civilised female icon. This was done as colonial modes of performance and mimicry were seen to be crucial to effecting moral reform.<sup>99</sup>

### **Sisters Superior and Inferior: Femininity and its Constructs**

The valorisation of western women in the mission field as morally and spiritually superior to the degraded native women was a necessary method for effecting a ‘rescue’ of these women by the mission. They had to become the ennobling force of the mission to a large extent. When Eliza returns from her furlough in America, a native woman tells her, “the sahib’s house has been asleep for three years...but now the memsahib has come back it will wake up again”.<sup>100</sup>

Anna Johnston further adds that for the missionary discourse, “liberating colonised women was a humanitarian issue that even opponents of evangelical crusading could see was important, ensuring that saving women from themselves and their native societies was seen as a simple issue of social justice.”<sup>101</sup> Eliza struggles with the “Herculean task” of bringing literacy to the women of Assam and she records in jubilant terms:

...Two of the women, (one a member of the church, the last baptized) finished ‘the First Reading Book’ to-day; a great day for Assam! I do not think the Herculean task of two married women having learned to read, has ever before been accomplished in this province...our old Brahman pundit often comes along by my little school-room, and laughs at the idea of my spending my time teaching *women* to read...<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Keeler, Ornell. “Woman’s Work among the Assamese”. *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference held in Nowgong. December 18-29, 1886*. 184.

<sup>99</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 50.

<sup>100</sup> Brown. 354.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 58.

<sup>102</sup> Brown. 353.

Johnston writes that, “pedagogic practice itself was highly gendered...girls were predominantly educated to a level of basic literacy and numeracy, with an emphasis on domestic skills including housekeeping, sewing and lace-making. These roles were seen as crucial to their future roles as wives and mothers of the modern Indian nation...”<sup>103</sup> Often considering themselves as liberators and representatives of mighty imperial and colonial powers, missionary wives however presented a complex image of emancipation and domesticity. Examples can be seen in the very arena of education, which quickly became segregated along gender lines in a mission compound. The memsahib was responsible for the care and nurturing of girl students and any other female related issues. Eliza writes to her sister about her hectic schedule and numerous duties:

...I have had much to do, in getting the old house and its musty contents in order for housekeeping, besides much time has been spent in receiving calls and visits...they come to welcome me back...and to express their joy and surprise at my return...but oh, the children! They make doleful lamentations at my having left them behind, and say they don’t know how I am to live without them...<sup>104</sup>

Talking about femininity as a set of socially constructed discursive framework, Sara Mills contends that the discourses of femininity designated certain areas of experience as ‘feminine’ and often attempted to elide this with ‘female’. She further states that middle-class women were denied the outlet of waged work and encouraged to care for others. The maintenance of relationships was considered to be a domain of the feminine and as a consequence, women considered relationships and interest in other people as important. These traits defined them as feminine women. For Mills, it is interesting that the type of writing which women were encouraged to do was mainly concerned with the emotional sphere such as autobiography, letters and the novel.<sup>105</sup>

According to Mills, one of the most important elements in accounts of women’s travel writing is the way that feminism informed the texts. She identifies the period 1870-1930 as one where great transformations were taking place for women, politically in terms of the vote and changes in legal status, and socially, in terms of permissible dress and behaviour. She

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<sup>103</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 67-8.

<sup>104</sup> Brown. 355.

<sup>105</sup> Mills. 94-6.

terms this period as the period of the New Woman. Women began to be involved in trade union activity, and campaigning on issues such as alcoholism and the abolition of slavery. She shows how some travel texts of the period transgress the notion of imperial rule presenting a clash of feminine and colonial discourses. Such discourses construct texts which at one and the same time present a self that transgresses and conforms both to patriarchal and imperial discourses. Women travellers could not speak wholeheartedly with the voice of colonial discourse because of their role in western society and the way their role was structured by discourses of femininity.<sup>106</sup>

Others like Susan L. Roberson argue that women's travel writings reflect and relate spatial practices of mapping the self and making sense of experience, and provide a way for us to examine how women thought of their position and mobility in the world.<sup>107</sup> She goes on to say that even as women used travel as a challenge to immobility, they sought at the same time to strike some kind of balance with the domestic and the feminine. It is not a protest against male paradigms or ideologies of domesticity, but a negotiation between mobility and stasis, between new freedoms and traditional ideas, between the road and home.<sup>108</sup>

### **Conclusion: The Gift of the Apple**

How did missionary wives negotiate with these discourses of femininity in a colonial set-up, with all the complex implications of being members of the weaker sex as well as belonging to a superior race of colonizers? Nothing can be clearer than Mrs. E. G. Phillips' paper "The Work for Missionary wives" as she writes about the specific roles and duties of helpmeets:

...At the time of the creation the position accorded to women was that of helpmeet or counterpart of man. Possessed of the same general characteristics, and being his equal socially, she was well fitted for the place assigned her. Although he has the greater physical strength and is the better fitted to bear the heavy burdens of life, she has the ability to lighten these burdens...be his comforter in times of sorrow, as Rebekah comforted Isaac...<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Mills. 104-6.

<sup>107</sup> Roberson, Susan L. "American Women and Travel Writing", *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*. eds. Alfred Bendixen and Judith Hamera. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009. 215. Print.

<sup>108</sup> Roberson. 218.

<sup>109</sup> Phillips. 203.

In the same paper she quotes the Pauline instruction to women, to “train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” She exhorts the missionary wives to possess a “missionary spirit.”<sup>110</sup> Mrs. Phillips sums up her paper with the further directives:

...Some are best fitted for teaching, some for evangelistic work, while others might perhaps use some time to advantage in assisting their husbands in their literary work...He has revealed to us our duties as wives in that we are to be blessings to our husbands, diligent, prudent, benevolent, hospitable, and adorned with modesty, sobriety, and good works...<sup>111</sup>

Thus for missionary wives, the discourses of femininity naturally presumed the notion of helpmeet as an ideal of feminine perfection. Progress for women seems to have been tied up with contradictory ideals of Biblical femininity and modern womanhood. The episode of American Baptist activity in Assam was one strongly influenced by the Pauline teachings where women occupied a specially relegated subservient space.

In a letter to Eliza Brown when she was on furlough in America, her husband eulogizes her qualities as an ideal “American-hearted” wife. He writes:

...you, my love, will have an influence wherever you go... if anything on earth has ever afforded me cause of joy, it is that God has given me a true American – hearted wife, uncontaminated with the politeness, frivolity, two-sidedness and no-sidedness of fashionable people; one who has never held me back from the path of duty...<sup>112</sup>

Eliza Brown landed in New York on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1847 and wrote an affectionate, yet business-like letter to her husband in Assam, with duties to the mission never far from her mind:

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<sup>110</sup> Phillips. 204-9.

<sup>111</sup> Phillips. 210.

<sup>112</sup> Brown. 278.

...all appear most eager to obtain information respecting our mission. Do send me a small box of Assamese books as soon as possible. I have no copies of scriptures or tracts with me. Everybody wants an Assamese book, and I have but few to give...I plead hard for more missionaries, every chance I have. I tell everybody *I am not going back alone*. Thanks for your kind letters from Gauhati, and for the pretty verses you composed for your poor E-. I trust we shall be spared to meet again – keep up good courage, my lone one...<sup>113</sup>

Eliza Brown's efforts in the Assam mission were focused on creating proper epitomes of the accepted notions of Christian womanhood of the time. The letters of Eliza Brown are a testament to the conventional stances occupied by missionary women of the nineteenth century in India. She was a staunch partner and a devoted helpmeet to her husband. As one instance shows, when they were repeatedly urged by letters from America to return home for a brief furlough, Eliza exclaimed, "...that is impossible. Nathan has espoused the missionary cause as he did his wife, 'for better, for worse, till death do us part.'"<sup>114</sup> If the amount of sufferings undergone in the exercise of one's duties, and a wife's unwavering support to her husband are the true measures of a missionary wife, then Eliza Brown stands out as a shining beacon in the tradition of helpmeets. Begging for more support for the fledgling Assam Mission in America, Eliza's petitions echo the seriousness with which she considered her errand:

...our mission is still in its infancy. Our work there is but just begun, and shall it be left in this feeble state, or shall the men and the means be furnished from year to year, for carrying it on effectually? And, beloved brethren, *must I go back alone*, and my husband still labor on without an associate?...<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, her efforts made it possible for the flow of missionaries and their wives into the region of Assam from America, and for the subsequent narratives of Mary Mead Cark and Jessie Traver Moore to take shape. In summing up her contributions to the American Baptist Mission and its overseas concerns, *The Watchman and Reflector* of September 1871 acknowledged her labours, tellingly titled "Martyr Lives":

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<sup>113</sup> Brown. 284.

<sup>114</sup> Brown. 272.

<sup>115</sup> Brown. 294.

...if the blood of martyrs is the seed of church, the spirit of martyrs is its life...our female missionaries, in general, are such. They are holocausts on God's altar. We need only to know woman in her delicacy of make, her keenness of sensibility, her strength of attachment to home and country, her clinging love for husband and children, to be able to forecast the sufferings involved in her going forth to a life of toil amid the darkness and degradation of heathendom...we have been led to these thoughts by reading the sermon preached at the funeral of Mrs. Brown, wife of Dr. Nathan Brown, and with him formerly the founder of the mission to Assam...<sup>116</sup>

In the end, her life seems to become a foot-note in the persistent motif of martyrdom and suffering in the story of missionary legends. It is true that Eliza Brown's letters and life not only bring us into confrontations with the finer nuances of intangible but desirable ideals such as emancipation, they are also pointers to the subsequent baggage that accompany any encounters in Contact Zones.

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<sup>116</sup> Brown. 514-15.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MARY MEAD CLARK'S *A CORNER IN INDIA*: REIMAGINING BLANK SPACES

My reading of Mary Mead Clark's *A corner in India* will be to illustrate and focus on the cultural stereotypes and reconstructions by the first missionary travellers in the Naga Hills. Their varied ways of seeing, locating and representations of native ways of life was complex at the most, their gazes shifting and conflicting simultaneously in their accounts. The consciousness and imposition of *Blank Spaces* in their texts and their espousal of the utopian ideals of a *sin free* Christian community are problematic portrayals of the mission enterprise, especially in the heydays of the nineteenth-century colonial enterprise. I will also attempt to show the trend of contestation of values that emerge as a by-product of zealous mission/colonial efforts in the quest for a *sin free* state. The other issues that will be a constant motif in this chapter will be a continuation of the questions raised in the previous chapter "The Letters of Eliza Brown: Stances of Domesticity and Emancipation"; whether there are such stances in Clark's account, and if so, how are they asserted or negotiated? What are the conventional modes of self-representation evident in the writings of Mary Clark? How does she deal with the question of the colonised native women? We will examine whether the enterprise of knowledge-gathering is presented as a gendered activity in *A Corner in India* and lastly, how does a missionizing project participate or collude in the appropriation/deconstruction of a subjugated people?

Talking about women travellers in relation to discourses of empire, Susan Blake raises the question of gender and if gender as a category makes a difference at all in narratives of colonization. She states that writing by Victorian women travel writers invariably "repeats unquestioningly both imperial attitudes" and "popular stereotypes of independent women." Blake adds that, "in the endorsements of empire, they follow, though often less emphatically, the conventions of men's narratives..."<sup>117</sup> While sketching a portrait of the Victorian women traveller as eccentric and unmarried individuals, she concludes that women, "unless they

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<sup>117</sup> Blake, "A Woman's Trek: What Difference does Gender make?" in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, pp 19-20.



were missionaries,” “traveled for travel’s own sake because, except for the church, the institutions of empire excluded women.”<sup>118</sup>

Discoursing on travel writing by women, Sara Mills holds that the work of women travel writers cannot be fitted neatly within the Orientalist framework, and seems to constitute an “alternative and undermining voice because of the conflicting discourses at work in their texts.” Women travel writers cannot be said to speak from outside colonial discourse, but their relation to the dominant discourse is problematic. Mills identifies this problem as due to the conflicts of the dominant discourse [of colonialism] with the discourses of ‘femininity,’ which were operating on them in equal and sometimes stronger measure.<sup>119</sup>

Yet another constraint in the genre of travel writing by women, as Mills points out, is the constraints on the reception. While travel writing has a problematic history in its relation to ‘truth,’ women’s writing is systematically judged to be exaggerated. More specifically, accusations of falsehood are levelled because very often, the representations in the text do not fit in with a stereotypical conception of what women can do. Another critical reception of women’s literary writing by feminists and others, according to Mills, is that such writings are “non-literary.” She notes the assumptions that such travel accounts were simply reproductions of journals or letters to families and hence not literary, though in many cases, women wrote the texts in the forms of journals because that was the convention of the times. She also notes that many of the women did not keep journals during the journey and therefore the journals are fictional interventions after the fact.<sup>120</sup>

With her arrival in Assam in March 1869, Mary Mead Clark may be seen as belonging to the second generation of missionary wives, nearly fourteen years after Eliza Brown’s departure from Assam in 1855. Thus, it is fitting to read her writings as a continuation of missionary women’s writings in North Eastern India, and not as a separate event from Eliza Brown’s days in Assam.

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<sup>118</sup> Blake. 21.

<sup>119</sup> Mills. 63.

<sup>120</sup> Mills. 108-110.

## Writing the Contact Zones

Mary Mead Clark and her husband Edward Winter Clark embarked to their mission field in Sibsagar, Assam from Boston, America on October 1868. She writes ‘...we left Boston in the bark “Pearl” a trading vessel of three hundred tons burden, bound for Calcutta via the Cape of Good Hope.’<sup>121</sup> It was a difficult voyage that took the Clarks one hundred and sixty days, being “...prisoners on the deep, subject to the storms and hardships...tossed like a football by angry waves, dashing and breaking and flooding the decks...”<sup>122</sup> From Calcutta, they took the “snail-like traffic steamer for the long, tedious journey up the turbid waters of the crooked, winding Brahmaputra...in consequence of cholera on board we made our journey in fourteen days.”<sup>123</sup> The travellers’ bungalow at “Dikho Mukh” was a transit point for the new arrivals and they spent a “comfortless night with rats and cockroaches, and in wakeful fear of snakes and centipedes.”<sup>124</sup> From there, they had to cross several miles of jungle by elephant to the Dikhu River, and finally on to Sibsagar by native boats, “...our motive power was natives [who], thrusting long poles into the bank, ran on after another the length of our deck. How wild, and strange, and fascinating withal that journey!”<sup>125</sup>

For the fresh arrivals from America, the lengthy and dangerous travel was not without its store of fascinations. As they came across a “native village”:

...a heathen festival and worship was in progress, and all night long the din of drums, the blowing of horns, weird shoutings to wake up the gods, together with the responses of yelling jackals, hooting owls, and screaming monkeys, made confusion worse confounded...<sup>126</sup>

Mary Clark describes her first encounter with the Nagas in colourful terms, a style that is not uncommon for writers to employ in travel narratives. It is a dramatic opening introduction, where there is a very significant contact taking place between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized,” between “order” and “disorder”:

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<sup>121</sup> Clark. 6.

<sup>122</sup> Clark.

<sup>123</sup> Clark. 7.

<sup>124</sup> Clark.

<sup>125</sup> Clark. 8.

<sup>126</sup> Clark.

...“I don’t want the goat! I don’t want it! I will not have it! Take it away, take it away,” was reiterated again and again; yet these strange, uncivilized men, down from their mountain fastnesses, still persisted in dragging up the steps of the veranda of our bungalow a large, long-horned hill goat, hoping to receive from us double or quadruple its value...<sup>127</sup>

This opening is a symbolic representation of all the encounters between an ordered society and a wild people, where the people belonging to the former try to impose a sense of order and discipline on the latter. And so the writer comes into contact with the wild Nagas, an event that will hold immense significance both for the missionary couple and the Nagas:

...thus was I introduced to these stalwart, robust warriors, dressed mostly in war medals, goat’s hair, dyed red and yellow, and also fringed with the long black hair of a woman, telling the story of bloody deeds...<sup>128</sup>

Susan Blake succinctly sums up such an encounter between dichotomies in her essay. Going beyond Mary Louise Pratt’s hypothesis of a “courtly encounter” between the traveller and the native, she says thus:

...in the imperial period, however, the encounter is not necessarily courtly. It holds the potential for domination as well as dialogue, and its representation dramatizes the narrator’s understanding of authority, dependency, and reciprocity...<sup>129</sup>

There is enough suggestion of a sense of adventure coupled with danger, but also the implication that a successful Christianisation of these savages would bear untold rewards for the missionary couple. After all, mission work was more heroic and meaningful to the mission enterprise in the face of much trials and hardships. Her emphatic refusals to accept the goat for barter seeks to establish positions of authority and subservience. The depiction of these wild savages successfully invokes the idea of promising potential subjects to be brought under the aegis of mission activity. She also reminds the reader of this uphill task of

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<sup>127</sup> Clark. 1.

<sup>128</sup> Clark.

<sup>129</sup> Blake. 22.

proselytising to these people from the Hills, as the missionary couple would have to forgo their simple comforts of life in exchange for certain danger and discomfort:

...as I looked for the first time into the hard faces of these hill people, dubbed by the Assamese “head cutters,” how little I thought that our commodious, pleasant bungalow, with its garden and its flowers, situated on the bank of the artificial lake at Sibsagar (Sib’s or Siva’s Ocean), would be left for a home in a small bamboo mat house in the mountain wilds...<sup>130</sup>

Chapters One through Four are titled “Hill Tribes of Assam,” “Beginning among the Nagas,” “A Plunge into Barbarism,” and “From Dekha Haimong to Molung” in that order. I have discerned a commonality of themes in these chapters and therefore for the purpose of unifying the thematic motifs, these four chapters will be read as the first stage of her travel narrative. The events which she describes in these chapters concern the shaky beginnings of mission enterprise among the Nagas in the Hills. The Hills looming in the background as an ever-present entity is a persistent reminder to the Clarks of the work that awaits them there.

Edward Clark was sent out to Assam by the missionary union as a superintendent of the Mission Press in Sibsagar, largely responsible for the printing of tracts, pamphlets, Bible stories for children, translations of the Bible, English to vernacular dictionaries etc. However, this literary designation was to be short-lived as he felt a different calling. His wife writes:

...from the broad veranda of the mission bungalow we looked out day after day, on and on beyond the villages, across the rice plains, upon the mountains towering in silent grandeur against the southern sky, as if watching for the feet of him who bringeth good tidings that publisheth peace...<sup>131</sup>

The Clarks were excited at the prospect of setting up a mission among the Nagas in the mountains, a task which was more challenging than the Mission Press designation. The Naga tribes, who lived in the mountains, had come into contact with the American missionaries in the plains of Assam even during the early days of mission activities in Assam during the 1830’s. One can see the hesitant negotiations and exchange between the Hills men and the

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<sup>130</sup> Clark. 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> Clark. 9.

missionaries, doubly enhanced by the presence of the typesetting machine of the printing press. The mission compound in Sibsagar becomes a site of spectacle:

...as each cold season came around hill men came in for trade and sight-seeing. Our press building, with its typesetting, printing, and binding of books was for them the wonder of wonders...<sup>132</sup>

Thus, the mission press station in Sibsagar becomes the setting of a “Contact Zone,” a social space “where disparate cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” The aftermaths of such encounters are events like colonialism, slavery and so on.<sup>133</sup>

This Contact Zone becomes an area of tentative and careful negotiations:

...Some of the great men, dressed in their military costumes, came one day to our schoolhouse door and, manifesting much interest in what we were doing, were asked, “wouldn’t you like us to come up to your village and teach your children as you see these being taught?” A chief replied, “Yes we will send our children to learn.” “But we hear you take heads up there.” “Oh, yes, we do,” he replied, and seizing a boy by the head gave us in a quite harmless way an object-lesson of how they did it...<sup>134</sup>

If this setting is a “Contact Zone,” then the incident described above is also one of transculturation taking place, since it is a phenomenon of the Contact Zone. According to Mary Louise Pratt, transculturation manifests itself when subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. She says that while subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own culture, and what they use it for.<sup>135</sup> In this particular contact, the transculturation process is aided by some specific material-objects that embody civilization. The inanimate representatives of the western world such as the typesetter, printing machine, and the books

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<sup>132</sup> Clark.

<sup>133</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Clark. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*. 6.

are the inanimate mediators in this delicate negotiation. Here is also given the suggestion that though the natives were ready to participate in this transculturation, such an exchange would be one-sided, for they still communicated a sense of menace to the missionaries.

On the other hand, the above-quoted encounter between the natives and the missionaries resembles what Pratt calls an “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic expression,” which refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms. Such an expression, she states, involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, if the chief demonstrated his savagery and confirmed the westerner’s fears, it was not actually an assertion of his blood-thirsty nature but rather providing a representation of himself in conformity to the missionary’s definition of a savage.

Nevertheless, they remained a wholly elusive people to the Baptist missionaries, partly due to the reluctance and fear of the plains natives/guides to lead the missionaries into the unknown terrains of the hills people:

...we told our Assamese Christians how we longed to bear the message to those distant wilds. They shook their head doubtfully. “They are savages, sahib, village warring with village, constantly cutting off heads to get skulls”...<sup>137</sup>

The missionaries were not to be deterred however, and managed to find a volunteer in an Assamese evangelist and teacher, Godhula, “who caught the spirit of advance and volunteered to make the first venture.”<sup>138</sup> They found a “Naga man living near Sibsagar” whom they persuaded to “talk about his people” and the evangelist “listened with open ears and soon could speak a little of that language.”<sup>139</sup> This can be construed as the first exchange of information between an Ao Naga and the missionaries, and “when the cold season of 1871 came around Godhula, with his Naga companion, started out for the tea gardens lying around the base of the Hills, with orders from Mr. Clark to go no further if to do so would be at too great risk.”<sup>140</sup> Godhula’s trip to the base of the Hills, though hesitant, proved to be useful in

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<sup>136</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*. 7.

<sup>137</sup> Clark. 9-10.

<sup>138</sup> Clark. 10.

<sup>139</sup> Clark.

<sup>140</sup> Clark.

coming into contact with other members of the tribe. On the event of this trip, Mary Clark writes that, “Godhula met many men from Dekha Haimong village (present-day Molungkimong) and shared with them his own finer rice, smoked and talked with them, and gradually gained their confidence.”<sup>141</sup> This was to be the second contact between the mission and the Ao Nagas. However, though the initial semblance of friendship was forged, the Dekha Haimong people were still reluctant to invite a stranger into their midst. The fear of “company men” made them suspicious:

...but when he proposed to accompany them to their home village, ah! That was a different matter. None of the “tartars” (village officials) were with them, and what right had they to bring a “subject man”, “a company man” (one living under English rule) into their territory? But Godhula was not easily shaken off. “well, come along then; we’ll guard you on the way, but when we get there all must be as the tartars say” ...<sup>142</sup>

Finally, Godhula managed to convince some of the villagers of his sincere intentions. The event of the third contact is enacted at the village, with the evangelist proclaiming himself as “teacher of a new religion,” and greeted with suspicion and contempt by the natives:

...“what do we want of this man’s new religion? Exclaimed one of the chief men, among the first to espouse the cause later on. “Send him off,” “Get him out of the way,” “A spy, doubtless, of the ‘Company’” exclaimed others...<sup>143</sup>

Subsequent events inform us that this tentative third contact was only the beginning of much determined forays of the mission into the hills. An excerpt from Edward Clark’s letter of December 1871 expresses the apprehension and ensuing feeling of relief as a result of this first successful contact with the Ao Nagas. Mr. Clark wrote:

...several months ago I sent one of the very best of my native assistants at picking up Naga. He has partially mastered one dialect; he has been on the Hills. At first he was doubtless in considerable peril for his life, as they

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<sup>141</sup> Clark.

<sup>142</sup> Clark. 10-11.

<sup>143</sup> Clark. 11.

suspected him of being a Government spy. Even after he had got in one of their villages, for three days no man, woman or child would speak with him socially. All the talk was official...but at the end of three days, they became convinced that he was not Government spy... He was one week on the Hills...<sup>144</sup>

Mrs. Clark's narrative about Godhula's visit to Dekha Haimong corroborates with the events described by her husband in more ornate terms. The sense of danger and tension conveyed in Mr. Clark's letter pales in comparison to his wife's description of the ominous contact, for there are no temporal or official negotiations taking place in Mary Clark's narrative. The only struggle is one of the spiritual, and finally the people are won over by the religious singing of the evangelist Godhula:

...A small rude hut was assigned to Godhula and a guard appointed to watch him closely. For two or three days not a man, woman or child would go near his house. But when with his deep-toned, melodious voice he poured out his soul in the sweet gospel hymns in Assamese the people flocked around him and listened as he told them, in his own eloquent way, the sweet old, old story. Jesus and heaven were names now heard for the first time...<sup>145</sup>

Wendy Martin in her Introduction to *Colonial American Travel Narratives* writes about the undiminished appeal of the captivity narrative such as *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Rowlandson* for American readers in the seventeenth-century and ever since. Early American readers embraced such spiritual melodramas as a respite from daily biblical and military readings. She continues that, by using a typological framework in which adverse situations are explained through biblical symbolisms; this kind of narrative entertains while emphasizing the rewards of an afterlife rather than the pleasures of daily life.<sup>146</sup>

That Mrs. Clark employs the captivity narrative in her account of Godhula's imprisonment is clearly illustrated above. In the Introduction to *A Corner in India*, William Elmsworth Witter lists the appeal of the book to the readers, and writes that "this is a fine book for vacation

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<sup>144</sup> Barpujari. 266.

<sup>145</sup> Clark. 11.

<sup>146</sup> Martin, Wendy. ed. *Colonial American Travel Narratives*. New York: Penguin, 1994. viii-ix. Print.



reading. It smells of the forests, kindles the imagination, warms the heart, is better than a novel, for it is not only full of romance, but is true.”<sup>147</sup>

As far as this narrative is concerned, it is a bloodless and non-violent victory achieved by the supernatural power of songs. And as suddenly, the atmosphere of menace and suspicion, the tension, and the quiet watchfulness of the natives are all transformed at once. Godhula the native Assamese preacher acts as a proxy eye, and also as a harbinger for the advent of the missionaries, singing his songs to win over the villagers. The savage village community metamorphoses into a lyrical, music-loving peaceful Eden and all traces of the terrible head-hunters are erased:

...The people coming up from their day's work at evening were conscious of a new, a different atmosphere. The influence of peace and love began to soften their hard hearts, and they called this rude grass hut “the sweet home,” the peaceful place. Soon the bands which made Godhula a prisoner were loosed and the freedom of the village was his...<sup>148</sup>

After this encouraging visit to the Hills, preparations were underway to send the native evangelist to Dekha Haimong, to live and preach among the natives. April 1872 saw Godhula and his wife Lucy setting off to the Hills to lay the first foundation of the Baptist mission. Mary Clark says “this was a bold venture. No one from civilization had before attempted it...”<sup>149</sup> This was no doubt a challenge which conformed to the ethos of the mission spirit, to go into unknown parts and preach the Gospel.

### **The Jungle Metaphor**

Since the savages had been given a semblance of form and humanity, it is time for the missionary to venture into the Hills. This expedition would serve Clark the distinction of being the first white man to visit the Hills, as the Naga Hills were not yet annexed to British India in the year 1872. His wife adds that, “during this venture beyond the British flag and postal service no intelligence could be received from Mr. Clark.” When the missionary was

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<sup>147</sup> Clark.

<sup>148</sup> Clark.

<sup>149</sup> Clark. 12.

told by well-wishers, “they are savages, sahib, village warring with village, constantly cutting off heads to get skulls,”<sup>150</sup> he replied:

...The voice of my departed Lord,  
 ‘Go teach all nations’ ...  
 Comes on the night air and  
 awakes my ear,  
 And I *will go*...<sup>151</sup>

It is noteworthy that in spite of the sinister aspect of the jungle, there is a shift in rhetoric on the event of Clark’s visit, as the narratorial eye views the landscape. Mary Clark did not accompany her husband, but her description of the journey is no less picturesque, as even in her absence, the Naga village appears thus:

...with plenty of tree branches and leaves at hand snug lodgings rose like  
 magic...<sup>152</sup>

The setting is magical and there is no room for fear or discomfort in the jungle, as they are adventurers on a new venture. Fear and worry are significantly absent as the memsahib bravely waits for her husband’s return from the Hills as she reproduces her conversation with Colonel Campbell, the then Chief Magistrate of Sibsagar:

...“When have you last heard from Mr. Clark?” “Do you ever expect to see your husband back with his head on his shoulders?”...from the heart there ever came the answer: “ Yes, Colonel Campbell, I expect him back with his head on; I trust to a higher power than the English government to keep my husband’s head on his shoulders...”<sup>153</sup>

In travel narratives, according to Barbara Korte, tales of courage and adventure were a pre-requisite feature of the narrative. She says that Victorian explorers appeared in their accounts every bit as courageous and enduring as the protagonists of the contemporary adventure

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<sup>150</sup> Clark. 9-10.

<sup>151</sup> Clark. 10.

<sup>152</sup> Clark. 13-14.

<sup>153</sup> Clark. 14.

novel. The travelling heroes offered their readers the thrill of adventures with an exciting travel plot, making the travelling persona an interesting character within this plot.<sup>154</sup> Sara Mills also states that, given their ‘factual’ status, women’s travel accounts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are potentially extremely subversive, since they portray women characters as strong, active individuals in stark contrast to their representations in the novels, plays and poetry of the time.<sup>155</sup>

Soon after this first expedition, Clark finally got permission from the Home Board in America to go and live in the Naga Hills as a missionary. Relieved of his literary duties in the Mission Press Sibsagar, he “reported himself at Dekha Haimong in the Hills, 1876.”<sup>156</sup> By this time Mrs. Clark had gone home for a furlough in America and would join him in the hills only in 1877. In spite of her absence during this momentous trip, she offers vivid details of the vicissitudes faced by the missionary. There was no support from the government for the missionary, as “the English government was still smarting from the recent rout of a long survey party sent to reconnoiter this territory and the brutal murder of Captain Butler with one of his native soldiers.”<sup>157</sup> On top of this, she writes that “no inducement could have persuaded an Assamese servant to accompany him.”<sup>158</sup> In this way, Mary Clark’s husband was the quintessential missionary-explorer in the footsteps of the lionized David Livingstone, an ideal strived at by many fellow missionaries at the time. The consciousness of this as a new enterprise is stressed by Mary in her own words:

...To live beyond the English flag at that time required a permit from the Viceroy of India, residing in Calcutta. On making application Mr. Clark received the reply that should he enter the Naga wilds he must do it at his own risk, with no expectations whatever of protection from British arms...<sup>159</sup>

The next inevitable stage is set, and when the Nagas come down “stammering” from the Hills after the calming influence of Godhula’s songs, they are in the process of learning a new language, and seeing with new eyes. It is a metamorphoses all but complete, and one cannot

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<sup>154</sup> Korte, Barbara. *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*. Trans. Catherine Matthias. London: Macmillan, 2000. 88-9. Print.

<sup>155</sup> Mills. 119.

<sup>156</sup> Clark. 15.

<sup>157</sup> Clark. 16.

<sup>158</sup> Clark.

<sup>159</sup> Clark. 15-16.

help but be reminded of the Shakespearean Caliban. The comparison is a tired one in post-colonial debates, but is no doubt apt, for the conquering of savages necessitates an entirely brand new repertoire. The savage has to unlearn his past and learn a present/future:

...It was a touching, solemn scene in our mission chapel at Sibsagor when these wild men, battle-axe and spear in hand, with stammering tongues tried to tell in broken Assamese, with help in as imperfect Naga from their teacher, of this newly found Saviour, and of their desire to follow in his ordinances... “It is all light!” “It is all light!” was their joyful exclamation when later we gathered around the table of our Lord...<sup>160</sup>

Ronald Inden talks about the usage of “metaphor” in the construction of India as the West’s Other. Such discourses had the tendency to “compare these denigrating metaphors with metaphors that elevate the self.” He argues that many Indologists and other human scientists may have consciously assumed that their metaphors were representations of reality or unconsciously presupposed it.<sup>161</sup> In Mary Clark’s account, there are overt uses of metaphors throughout the narrative, which presume to define the natives and reinforce these definitions. Descriptions of “wild men” with “stammering tongues,” speaking in a “broken” language and discovering the gift of sight are clearly examples where the writer employs “metaphorical usage” in the construction of the Other as ‘lacking’ or incomplete.

The task facing the missionary is enormous, since the civilizing endeavour of a savage community is a back-breaking, industrious undertaking. To transform the crude forms of this savage people, more effort is required than simply teaching them how to speak and see. Here Mary Clark uses the metaphor of industry to describe the hard labour of her husband among these crude people:

...there in a crowded village, fortified by a heavy stockade, was begun the mining of this unwritten language and the necessary deeper delving to unearth the real character of these new parishioners...<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Clark. 13.

<sup>161</sup> Inden. 2-10.

<sup>162</sup> Clark. 16.

This metaphor of “mining” and “unearthing” an unwritten language while giving an impression of hard labour to be undertaken by the missionary, at the same time hints at some amount of treasure to be discovered. It also implies a steadfast belief in the capacity to produce what Inden terms as ‘imperial knowledges,’ by “persons and institutions who claim to speak with authority.” Such persons, according to Inden, appear successfully to speak not only for their own or some special interest, but for the interests of wholes, of others as well as of selves.<sup>163</sup>

Settling down to his labours in the village, the sense of isolation is so acute in this far away land that even the tom-toms of the once dreadful drums is a comforting affirmation of the presence of life. As Marie Louise Pratt describes, sometimes in the information-producing travel accounts, “only the traces of people are apparent – not the people themselves.” In nineteenth-century exploration writing, the “reverie” convention often very specifically projects the civilizing mission onto the scene.<sup>164</sup> Thus, when Mary Clark imagines her husband’s labours in the Naga Hills, the blank spaces bereft of any trappings of civilization and peopled with incomplete beings, starts forming into distinct shapes with sounds from the soon to be forbidden war drums:

...far removed from everything approaching music, the sound of the huge drum – the Naga tocsin – calling the people from cultivation or jungle, was not an unwelcome sound...<sup>165</sup>

Because of Clark’s unrelenting efforts to introduce this “new religion” to the villagers, fractures and cracks start appearing in the very fabric of village affairs. It is an excellent example of a tussle between age-old beliefs and a new way of life. The persistent suspicions of “company men” and spies from the plains prevent most members of the village from warming up to his presence. Even the other neighbouring villages of Dekha Haimong caution them to be careful:

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<sup>163</sup> Inden. 36.

<sup>164</sup> Pratt, Marie Louise. “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrows Saw in the Land of the Bushmen.” *Race, Writing and Difference*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986. 145. Print.

<sup>165</sup> Clark. 16.

...The village was divided regarding this new order of things and far from one mind in permitting continued residence of this white-faced foreigner. Neighbouring villages were saying, “you will find sooner or later that this great rajah preacher is a disguised agent of ‘The Company.’” “Has he not the same white face?...”<sup>166</sup>

In due course of time, events converge so that the old way of life cannot get along with the new ways. Many a times “Satan was not idle” and “repeated efforts were made by the opponents of Christianity to inveigle their village into war with other villages.” War parties plot numerous ambushes to intimidate the missionary, only to return unsuccessful and instead “racked with fever.” Such opportunities afford the missionary a chance “of exercising some medical skill and taming their savagery.”<sup>167</sup>

Mary Clark attempts to rationalize these skirmishes in the Contact Zone, endowing the Hill men with a wildness that refuses to be tamed by any other temporal power. She furnishes them with enough crude cunning to realise that their “cruel faith” will be wiped out by the gospel of “peace and love.” These depictions of the Hill men as a proud people “glorifying in their independence” is but only a narrative device to lend a more heroic dimension to the entire narrative of conquest. Missionary narratives revel in successful happy endings of deliverance after fighting not a one-sided fight, but the “good fight,” and as a result she elevates the figure of the missionary to epic proportions:

...these savage hill men were utterly opposed to any movement that foreshadowed in the least any alliance whatever with this great and ever-encroaching power. Adherents of the old, cruel faith were quick to see that the gospel of peace and love would rapidly empty their skull houses and put to rout most of the old customs handed down from forefathers, for whom they held the greatest reverence...<sup>168</sup>

This passage shows too, the sense of cultural superiority that can so arbitrarily and completely denounce a way of life that had existed for ages. At this point the natives find

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<sup>166</sup> Clark.

<sup>167</sup> Clark. 18.

<sup>168</sup> Clark. 17.

themselves confronting something more ruthless than themselves but not tangible. It is the spirit of change that would “empty their skull houses.” Mary uses a very apt simile here, describing the zeal of the missionary as a “wildfire”:

...The missionary’s presence and his teachings had spread like wildfire from mountain peak to mountain peak and everywhere was fostered the suspicious spirit...<sup>169</sup>

To quote Mary Louise Pratt in the context of nineteenth-century exploration travel, “exploration certainly lends itself to heroic narrative paradigms of adventure, personal prowess, obstacles overcome and prizes won, and explorers in the nineteenth-century were certainly seen as heroes.” However, she suggests that most of them did not write themselves as heroes and in fact, she goes on, one of the most striking aspects of the informational branch of travel writing is the way it reverses and refuses heroic priorities. The European protagonists are everywhere on the margins of their own story, present not as heroes but as effaced information-producers gazing in from a periphery.<sup>170</sup> And thus too does Mary Clark speak about her husband’s heroism, even from her position of absence in the hills.

The incidents that take place in chapter three “A Plunge into Barbarism” are rife with the simmering menace of the natives. The narrative here is fraught with contact skirmishes, which is an inevitable phase in the process of bringing order on a state of disorder. Their savagery proves to be no match against the civilizing prowess of the West. It is a victory for Clark. And thus, a significant decision is taken by the missionary and his followers to go away from the hostile environs of Dekha Haimong and establish a Christian colony with the few believers. This is the beginning of the great change, a breach between the old and the new, heathen and Christian, savage and civilized. The new Village, Molung, had every promise and prospect for success and prosperity:

...this Molung crest, so rich in promise of abundant harvests, and now the adherents of the new faith, persecuted at home, determined to put into execution this long-mooted project...<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Clark.

<sup>170</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 146.

<sup>171</sup> Clark. 19.

The missionary gathers the faithful comprising of fifteen families for the exodus which is greeted with taunts, jeers and scorn from the non-Christian inhabitants of Dekha Haimong, shouting at the believers “go now, but you’ll soon come back.” This new village would not only ensure the villagers freedom from religious persecution, but Mary Clark notes that “the Christians, having been leaders in the enterprise, would be in the ascendancy in the new colony.” And so on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1876, the new village of Molung comes into being, “and for two nights the beautiful starry canopy was their only shelter.”<sup>172</sup>

In the subsequent narrative, a compelling image is painted of “the little Christian band alone in the wilderness” surrounding by hostile heathen villages. An atmosphere of fear and menace threatens the inhabitants of this village as they have given up the former custom of head-hunting as a pre-condition of their new-found religion. The jungle telegraph goes into overdrive and “all sorts of rumours were now rife of the proposed attack...” and they are even threatened “that the white man’s blood would flow quite as easily as that of the sturdy mountaineer.”

Events converge so badly for the Christian village, hemmed in on every side by the savage heathens that the missionary starts despairing for their well-being. He then suggests to his flock whether it would be better to go back and seek refuge in the old village, which is fervently refused:

...“No,” came the reply, “we will never go back to so bad a rule and such vexatious persecution; we will go with you, ‘father,’ to the plains of Assam, anywhere you will, but never back to Dekha Haimong...”<sup>173</sup>

### **Positioning the Selves**

Leaving aside the ostensible colonial rhetoric where a native assumes the persona of a child and the white man becomes a “father” figure, there are other complexities in the narrative. Firstly, the narrator is consistently present throughout the narrative even during her periods of furlough away in America. We can only surmise that the narrator stitches the chronology of these events mostly from the letters or records of her husband, after the incidents have taken

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<sup>172</sup> Clark. 20.

<sup>173</sup> Clark. 22.



place. Secondly, the female writer tends to assume the narratorial voice of the male figure in the tale, whereby her authorial rhetoric gets blended with the voice of her male hero. Thirdly, we realise that it is the eyes of the author seeing through her husband's eyes and narrating the story, which then suggests at an ambiguity of gazes. Fourthly, not only does she see by "proxy," her voice is also not her own voice. Which voice then dominates this tale? Is it the male character or the female narrator? And finally, the above quoted passage suggests that not only does the child cling to the father, but the child is given voice and speech by the mother, since the writer presumes to speak on behalf of her native characters.

A coherent 'self,' Sara Mills argues, is impossible in textual terms. She explains that one of the major problems in the analysing of women's travel writing is the assumption that they are autobiographical and straightforward transcriptions of the lives of the women travellers. In most writings, the 'self' is presumed to be the writer's self which is translated into the persona or narrative of the text, whereby the reader presumes to discover the 'self' of the woman travel writer in the narrator position in the text. One problem that arises with such kind of assumption is the idea that the self can be faithfully transcribed into a text. Mills addresses the conundrum posed by these suppositions by stating that the self cannot be easily grasped, and the representation of it is even less so, because it is mediated by discourse. She continues that this is further complicated with texts from another period, as we cannot be sure that we are reading with anything like the same frames of reference as the writers or readers of the time. This shows that our own notion of 'self' conflict quite markedly with other periods' textualisations and therefore, a coherent self in any narrative is impossible.<sup>174</sup>

Barbara Korte also points out this complexity which occurs in travel writing. She says that while an autobiographical element endows the element of authenticity to the narrative, it is further complicated by the fusing together of the "narrator of the account and the travelling persona in the plot" and "fused in the union of first-person narration." She states that the autobiographical nature of the text arises from the further extension of this union to the author him or herself.<sup>175</sup> Notwithstanding this assumption, she continues that:

...A narratological analysis of travel writing must distinguish between the author, the narrator and the travelling persona of an account. The voice

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<sup>174</sup> Mills. 36.

<sup>175</sup> Korte. 12.

narrating the journey may appear quite distinct from the ‘real’ author, for example when the narrator is posing or controlling him or herself in accordance with certain aims or social expectations. The narrator may also, just as the first-person narrator of a novel, create a certain distance from himself as persona in the travel plot...<sup>176</sup>

At the very end of chapter four, the authorial voice emerges as herself, merging with her own character, on Clark’s return to Assam in 1877 to join her husband in the new Christian village:

...Prospects had now assumed a decidedly more hopeful aspect, and in my return from America, much recruited in health, I was permitted by the English government to join my husband in this independent hill territory...<sup>177</sup>

After reading the first four chapters, the impression that remains of the different ways of seeing/speaking as illustrated is one of an awakening. All the events that are described seem to have the quality of a dream narrative since the speaker is absent yet present throughout. We can conclude that the resultant motif from such a style of story-telling is one of reconstructions. Here, the events are re-imagined and re-presented and presented as a series of spontaneous happenings that took place, with authorial omissions and additions.

Throughout the narrative from chapters one through four, there is no conscious effort to individualise or give an identity to any of the natives. None of them are mentioned by name, and there is a very visible absence of female figures throughout the tale. The Nagas are, in fact most of the time referred to by the collective “they.” This formless and non-specific “they” negates all sense of self or individuality, rendering the native part of a menacing, unspecified and undefined collective. In the “*dramatis personae*,” names and characters are significantly absent, the only *named* personalities are the native evangelist Godhula as the “proxy gaze” and the heroic missionary. Moreover, the consciousness of the missionary’s heroism by the narrator is apparent when she writes that “the missionary resolved to stand by his people, to throw in his lot with them, trusting in the Lord alone for protection.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Korte.

<sup>177</sup> Korte.

<sup>178</sup> Clark. 24.

## Dissonant Gazes in the Blank Space

In the next chapters one can find an abundance of romanticism in the narrative. The narrative language is significantly more feminine than in the earlier chapters, thus enabling the feminine persona of the narrator to emerge while talking about the difficulties of travel. However, it is not only the feminine voice that speaks to the reader, but every now and again, an information-gathering, masculine aside can be discerned. The chapters are tellingly titled “To the Brown Nest” and “Among the Clouds” evoking the romantic ideals of travel writing. I will try to illustrate with examples these two distinct voices of the narrator/character: Mary the romantic traveller and Mary the geographer seeking information to map out the land.

Korte comments that despite the obvious elements of adventure in their texts, the majority of Victorian explorers were nevertheless also committed to imparting information and thus adding to the archive of knowledge. This, she contends is the reason Victorian accounts of exploration tend to include increasingly lengthy descriptions of natural and anthropological phenomena, as well as extensive scientific appendices and precise illustrations. Barbara Korte calls this stylistics “the mixture of adventure and ‘serious’ observation.”<sup>179</sup>

Anna Johnston in her essay on religious travel writing in nineteenth-century Australasia demonstrates how religious texts contribute to mapping new geographical and social genres in the travel genre. She says that missionary texts about Australasia were often strongly based in travel genres, in the sense that they mapped new geographical and social regions for an audience back home, and they utilized familiar modes and tropes of travel discourse. Descriptive of landscape and local cultures, missionary travel writing brought home an exotic new world to an armchair audience.<sup>180</sup>

On her first advent to the hills, Mary Clark describes her first journey with her husband, an itinerary that included transit points all along the way from Sibsagar to Amguri Tea garden, and then up the hill to Molung. Bullock carts and elephants were arranged to transport them for the twenty-two miles to Amguri, at the foot of the hills. After covering one mile from

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<sup>179</sup> Korte. 89-90.

<sup>180</sup> Johnston, Anna. “Writing the Southern Cross: Religious Travel Writing in Nineteenth-Century Australasia.” *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth-Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*. Ed. Tim Youngs. London: Anthem, 2006. 204. Print.

Sibsagar in a comfortable style, the difficult jungle track necessitates a forgoing of the comforts of travel:

...we exchanged the comfortable, civilized conveyance of pony and cart loaned us by Colonel Campbell for the barbarous swing-swang gait of the elephant. Eight miles by our pachyderm under the piercing rays of a midday tropical sun, and we were glad to find a pony and dog cart from Colonel Buckingham, Amguri, awaiting us at another heathen temple...<sup>181</sup>

Their stop at the Tea Garden is enthusiastically described in glowing terms:

...we entered Amguri Tea Estate, and through a long avenue of nahor trees, beautiful in their varied hues and shades, we arrived at the fine, spacious bungalow of this flourishing tea garden, comprising thousands of acres and giving employment to thirty thousand people...<sup>182</sup>

The entire Tea Estate is presented in very favourable terms, as a little self-contained paradise where even the manual labourers are shown to be free from any kind of hardships, and quite fortunate to be the subject to their benign masters. This kind of narrative wilfully obscures the actual lived-experiences of thousands of migrant labourers living under deplorable conditions in the tea gardens, at the same time it is a blatant declaration that there are plenty of potential pliable subjects in the mapping of God's empire:

...One evening we went to a little settlement of houses on the outskirts of a garden, where we found a crowd gathered around one of our own missionaries...it was beautiful to watch the look of rest stealing over those bronzed faces as they caught the message...<sup>183</sup>

After this brief sojourn in the Amguri tea Estate, Mary begins her ascent to the hills. The journey is awkward and uncomfortable in the hilly terrain accompanied by the Naga Hills

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<sup>181</sup> Clark. 27.

<sup>182</sup> Clark. 28.

<sup>183</sup> Clark.

“goods train,” comprised of men and women carrying native baskets or parcels not exceeding sixty pounds attached by bark bands suspended from their heads:

...five of the strongest men were detailed as my “Pullman” (pullmen), one at a time for my bamboo chair. The chief men, village officials, were also on hand, not to carry loads, oh, no! this would be beneath their dignity; they were here to give honor to the occasion. Surely there never was a queen more revered by her subjects than was now the wife of the Naga Hills’ missionary by his parishioners...<sup>184</sup>

The continued usage of the possessive pronoun “my” in the passages describing the unusual journey, and her self-conscious declaration of herself as a “queen” brings into focus the rhetoric of conquest and adventure. She foregrounds her character in this narrative as the matriarch of all she surveys; it is an assertive gesture of laying claim to the territory and the “parishioners” which is complex in its very implication. This conscious act of appropriating the terrain along with the subjects is abruptly effaced by the romanticising of the experience and the topography in the next paragraph. The language here is decidedly flowery and of a more “feminine” aspect than the earlier parlance of appropriation:

...the Naga burden-bearing song with response, “Oh-hee! Hee hoh! Ha-hee, Ho-hum! Halee-he, Ho-hum!” with repetition and variation, now sounding on my ears for the first time, was indeed very musical...<sup>185</sup>

For the rest of the up-hill ascent, difficult though it may be, the scenery is quite commendable:

...our route was simply a Naga trail, first across the lowlands where grow in such profusion the tall, feathery, waving bamboos, intertwined and interlaced, forming pretty, fantastic arbors across our path, and not infrequently necessitating the cutting of our way. On and on we went, up and down the lower hills, crossing mountain streams, through forests of stately trees with delicate

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<sup>184</sup> Clark. 29.

<sup>185</sup> Clark.

creepers entwining their giant trunks, their branches gracefully festooned with vines, and orchids swaying in the breeze...<sup>186</sup>

There is a noticeable absence of the menace presented in the earlier part of the narrative. Here, the trees and streams, the plants and vegetation are simply rich, majestic, admirable and full of potential. The only palpable feelings conveyed are those of enterprise and excitement, discovery and possession as we can see in the following lines:

...for all ages past, unobserved and unappreciated, this wilderness of beauty has budded and put forth, only to delight the eyes of Him who makes even the desert to blossom as the rose...reminded us that we were penetrating the regions beyond - were truly pioneers of a new enterprise. We were fast adding new and interesting experiences...<sup>187</sup>

Though such language can only be described as gushing and ornate, resolutely feminine in its delivery, it renders problematic the stance of its female narrator when we consider the content. The content here explicitly conveys a very nuanced masculine rhetoric of pioneering and going “beyond” of “penetrating” “unobserved and unappreciated” “wilderness.” The traveller declares that this journey only adds to her “experiences.”

Venturing into this unmapped and unformed space is rendered doubly exciting due to the sense of danger underlying the enterprise. This recalls Bill Ashcroft’s discourse on the significance of *Tabula Rasa* in the imperial enterprise. According to him, Captain Cook’s declaration of Australia as a *Terra Nullius* was an explicit geographical use of Locke’s *Tabula Rasa*, because of its potential, its unformedness, its amenability to inscription, despite its inherent menace. Ashcroft goes on to say, “It is at the same time the uninscribed, a land of fabulous possibility, and a land of the barbarous and sub-human. The unformedness of colonial space is the geographic metaphor of the savage mind.”<sup>188</sup>

Tim Youngs also illustrates a number of important characteristics and presuppositions of nineteenth-century travel writing and the idea of “blank spaces.” In his words:

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<sup>186</sup> Clark. 30.

<sup>187</sup> Clark.

<sup>188</sup> Ashcroft, Bill. *On Post- Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*. London: Continuum, 2001. 39-40. Print.

...First, that there were still, in the last quarter of the century (the nineteenth-century), large uncharted parts of the world. Second, that the motivation of travel was to fill those blanks (though they were not, of course, blanks to those who lived there). Third, that once ‘discovered’, many of those places would be exploited for their commercial potential. Fourth, that ideologies of race impacted on the representation of those places, as well as on dealings with those who inhabited them...<sup>189</sup>

Kay Schaffer in *Women and the Bush* holds that men and women are defined and define themselves within and across masculine and feminine categories. Schaffer notes that they can shift positions, men taking on feminine attributes and vice versa, although not without difficulty. When women act in ways deemed masculine, they can be afforded status, but their behaviour will be acceptable within a total social network of meanings only if they remain true to what is believed to be their feminine nature.<sup>190</sup>

Such complicated stances by female travellers can also be seen in the narratives of the celebrated Victorian travel writer Mary Kingsley, who combines humour, irony and a decidedly colonial language of conquest in her *Travels in West Africa* published in 1897. Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India*, belongs to roughly the same era, comprising of experiences gathered during 1869-1873, 1877-1882, and 1886-1901 (with gap years during her furloughs home) and finally published in 1907. Perhaps the similarity is inevitable considering the popularity of the travel genre during the late nineteenth century, and the whole-scale participation of Euro-American men and women in the discourse of travel and adventure.

The complexity of Mary Kingsley’s narration is often discussed in relation to her ambiguous positionings with regard to the whole idea of empire, conquest and evangelisation. With Mary Clark, the unease in her narratives rises due to a number of factors. Her foremost role/duty as a helpmeet is constantly confronted with her ‘self’ as a woman travel writer and as a pioneering conqueror. The idea of herself in the secondary role of helpmeet subservient to the primary position occupied by her husband (a male and a missionary) often provokes

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<sup>189</sup> Youngs, Tim. Introduction. *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*. 2.

<sup>190</sup> Schaffer, Kay. *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.14. Print.

her sense of self-effacement frequently seen in her narrative. Perhaps Mary Clark's unique and awkward positionings can be better understood if we look at the strict guidelines of behaviour and conduct for missionary wives at the time. During the jubilee conference of the Assam Mission in 1886, Mrs. E. G. Phillips presented a paper dealing with "The Work for Missionary Women", clearly stressing on the secondary and passive role of a missionary wife:

...We may not become *prominent* workers in the mission field, but He who rewards those who give a cup of cold water in His name, will He not reward us, though our works be insignificant in the sight of man?...He has revealed to us our duties as wives in that we are to be blessings to our husbands, diligent, prudent, benevolent, hospitable, and adorned with modesty, sobriety, and good works...<sup>191</sup>

If at all there are particular gendered ways of seeing, Barbara Korte explains that it is due to the fact that for a long time prejudices stood in the way of women travelling and writing about their experiences. She adds that, if only for this reason, some particular ways of seeing and manners of articulation have emerged in the travel writing of women.<sup>192</sup>

One probable explanation for the tone of self-effacement in Mary Clark's narrative might be due to her uneasy positioning as her husband's helpmeet, a subservient role that contradicted the authorial foregrounding in her account from time to time. Talking in the context of the London Missionary Society (LMS), Anna Johnston comments that missionary women did write about their own colonial experiences, but few women's texts were published by the LMS until later in the nineteenth century when women were employed in their own right. According to Johnston, the notion that women's roles were complementary to their ordained husbands' ensured that their textual presence was similarly seen as merely adjunctive. Later recruiting of educated middle and upper-class British women changed the perception of missionary women dramatically.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Phillips. 209-10.

<sup>192</sup> Korte. 108.

<sup>193</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 44.



The multiplicity of narratorial stances employed by Mary Clark seems to be the manifestation of a malady mostly suffered by Victorian women travellers, “herself Other in a male-dominated society,” and also “trained to see herself from a gentleman’s point of view.”<sup>194</sup> At the same time, she is very certain of her position as a woman in formerly unknown terrain, even beyond the protection of the British flag. Thus, one can identify instances where the writer constantly strives to authenticate her experiences as a woman while downplaying her position simultaneously. However, we must note that in Mary Clark, there is nothing of the persistent image of helpmeet and domesticity that can be seen in Eliza Brown.

When Sara Mills talks about travel accounts written by women, she reiterates that “although I am dealing solely with texts written by women...I do not want to align myself with a position of biological determinism.” She stresses on the necessity of recognising that, while women’s writing practices can vary because of the differences in discursive pressures, they will also share many factors with men’s writings.<sup>195</sup> Mills furthers the view that, to write with authority, women align themselves with colonial forces and thus potentially with a predominantly male and masculine force. This, however, does not imply that they are wearing a male disguise. Such writing, to Mills, seems more of a contest between masculine and feminine discourses, and other textual determinants.<sup>196</sup> She terms such positions of women writers a “double-bind situation,” since if they tend toward the discourses of femininity they are regarded as trivial, and if they draw on the adventure hero type narratives their work is questioned.<sup>197</sup>

Therefore, even while Mary Clark talks of pioneering new and exciting enterprises, almost in the same breath she mocks herself as merely a silly woman. Similarly, Susan Blake talks about the endeavours of Victorian traveller Mary Hall to convert her image from that of a “traveler to that of a lady,” with great “hilarity.” According to Blake, it is a “ladylike apology for unladylike behaviour,” and she parodies “the standards of ladyhood.”<sup>198</sup>

During a particularly dangerous time of inter-village clashes among the Ao nagas, Mrs. Clark returned to join her husband in the hills and found a group of ‘warriors’ who had come to

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<sup>194</sup> Blake. 30.

<sup>195</sup> Mills. 30.

<sup>196</sup> Mills. 44.

<sup>197</sup> Mills. 118.

<sup>198</sup> Blake. 32.

escort her safely to the village. On asking the men why they had taken so much trouble for her, they responded that “why, Mem Sahib, the whole ‘kingdom’ is down to take care of you.” The sense of authority she enjoyed over her ‘kingdom’ is effectively lightened and made amusing in the next lines:

...We started off with our long procession, body-guard in front of us, body-guard in rear of us, body-guard alongside of us. It was the beginning of the rainy season and leeches were plentiful; although in a chair on a man’s back far above the reach of these troublesome pests, yet one man was detailed especially to protect me. It was amusing to see the people with a jerk and a fling throw off these blood suckers...<sup>199</sup>

Of another such incident she writes:

...In returning from Yazang (Yajang) we found the river swollen, and there was much discussion as to how the Mem Sahib should be gotten over. “Too much cloth! Too much shoe and stocking!” they exclaimed. As the water reached only to their armpits, Mr. Clark said, “Oh, they’ll take you over easily...”<sup>200</sup>

Therefore, Clark’s self-mockery deliberately seeks to convey to the reader that while she might use the masculine rhetoric of conquest, there is nothing heroic or manly about her:

...I occasionally alighted from my chair for a little walk, a relief to my bearers as well as myself, but it was very certain that the long skirts from New York dressmakers were never intended for jungle paths and the crossing of deep ravines on a single tree trunk...<sup>201</sup>

On this occasion, while discoursing about dressmakers from New York and the western woman’s unsuitable garb for the jungle, she immediately brings the reader back to the ongoing adventure narrative by observing and sharing a tale. Thus, the feminising of the

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<sup>199</sup> Clark. 101.

<sup>200</sup> Clark. 86-7.

<sup>201</sup> Clark. 30.

writer as a silly woman traveller is immediately negated by the mention of bloody and terrible acts in the vicinity:

...My attention was directed to a precipitous descent on the left of our path, where, not long before, a party ambushing just above swooped down upon some travellers, leaving twenty-five bodies headless...<sup>202</sup>

This is a calm, matter-of-fact observation and there is no trace of the formerly ornate descriptions of the romantic landscape. Such abrupt shifts in the gaze of the traveller owes to the contemporary expectations of femininity which were on various levels at odds with the changes in perceptions about femininity. Korte comments on the conundrum of travelling women caught between the conventional expectations of their home societies and a counter-discourse of emancipation, leading to an awareness of “gender *ambiguity*.” This is why, she concludes, the travel accounts of women fluctuate between a confident record of their achievements and an apparent anxiousness not to come across as masculine.<sup>203</sup>

Sara Mills talks about textual constraints on narratives by women and names the woman critic Elizabeth Joyce as the only critic who considers the “textual constraints” on women writers. All other critics consider the texts to be straightforward autobiographical criticism, and analyse them using methods of autobiography. Here Mills invokes Elizabeth Joyce, when she showed that the role of the ‘hardy adventurer hero’ was simply not open to women writers. Therefore, Mills contends that when there is a tension in the narrative between a masculine persona and a female voice, it is a problem not of self-definition but of textual constraint.<sup>204</sup>

Lunching in the picturesque setting of a “clear, rapid stream...seated on a clean rock,” Mary enthuses “how romantic, how wild, how picknicky it seemed! European, Assamese, and Naga each partook of his own particular food...” The end of the journey is the most difficult part, “steeper and steeper, rockier and more rocky...,” until she is “in an almost horizontal position on the back of my bearer,” to an elevation of two thousand feet above the plain. Such a

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<sup>202</sup> Clark.

<sup>203</sup> Korte. 118.

<sup>204</sup> Mills. 39.

difficult climb is worth the effort, and she is pleased to find the villagers eagerly waiting to welcome their arrival:

...How cool and invigorating the air!...the people were out to give us welcome as we continued on to the farther end of the village, to the home awaiting us. There we held our first reception on the front veranda of the one mission bungalow in all those savage wilds...<sup>205</sup>

That this evangelical venture was in no ways comfortable or safe is reminded to the reader yet again, stressing on the self-sacrificing ethos of missionary endeavour. The lack of conveniences is stated with sensible logic, and there is an evident absence of the inconveniences of housekeeping in the Hills. Hardships, if there are, are calmly accepted without remorse. Any sense of domesticity associated to her role as a helpmeet to her husband is conspicuous by its absence:

“...Why live in such a house and with so few conveniences?” has been the oft-repeated question. Anything better than the Nagas could furnish was impracticable. No builders from the plains would come into the hills. It was most unwise to expend much time or money on a building within the village stockade alongside of Naga houses in the same inflammable material. There was, at that time, no security or property of life.<sup>206</sup>

The last sentence in the above passage is clearly reminiscent of the Hobbesian state of nature, where life was hard, brutish and short.

### **The Blank Face of the Country**

Apart from the all-seeing eye of the romantic traveller/female/adventurer, the other gaze that we find interspersed in several chapters, (for example in chapters five and six) is the gaze of the persistent information-gatherer. When she writes about her first visit to the Hills, she attempts to acquaint the reader with a workaday history of Assam, especially the part of Assam bordering the foothills:

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<sup>205</sup> Clark. 30-32.

<sup>206</sup> Clark. 34.

...we crossed the Dikhu river and entered royal grounds formerly occupied by the kings of Assam. This broad tract of level land, once covered by hundreds of native houses, is now largely grown up to jungle...<sup>207</sup>

Apart from filling up the blank spaces in this uninhabitable wilderness, Clark assumes the role of an interested observer, providing details as faithfully as she can. Her western audience can see through her eyes the ruins of ancient grandeur:

...That portion devoted exclusively to the royal family, embracing an area of many acres, was enclosed by two parallel brick walls, within which were the king's palace, treasury, and guard house. Their arched roofs, outer and inner walls, are of heavy brick masonry, noble relics of ancient days. In these solid walls and floors excavations, large and deep, have been made in search for the kings' jewels and treasures supposed to have been buried there...<sup>208</sup>

A hint of romance and eastern opulence is conveyed as she continues:

...A little outside the walled enclosure, located on the embankment of an excavated lake, is a fine temple of chaste, symmetrical proportions, named for the wife of one of the old kings, Joyhagor, *hagor* meaning ocean, really Joy's ocean. A short distance in another direction, still in very good repair, is the Rong-ghor (king's playhouse)...<sup>209</sup>

On reaching Molung, their little Christian village, Clark proceeds to acquaint her readers with the lay of the land. On top of the village, she gazes down and at the surrounding vista, imparting information on everything from weather, topography, landscape, crops, vegetation, flora, soil, minerals, animal life and so on:

...Our village, Molung, planted on the crest of a projecting spur of the second range of hills from the plain of Assam, twenty-six hundred feet above sea level, commanded a charming view of the Brahmaputra valley...far as the eye can

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<sup>207</sup> Clark. 26.

<sup>208</sup> Clark. 27.

<sup>209</sup> Clark.

reach, the early morning fogs of this valley in the cold season present a broad area of mist, rolling and tumbling like ocean billows in a storm...<sup>210</sup>

Mary Louise Pratt describes the “face of the country” narrative as a strange, attenuated kind of narrative since it does everything possible to minimize all human presence, including that of the people whose journey is being told. What is narrated, she continues, proves to be a descriptive sequence of sights/sites, with the travelers present chiefly as a collective moving eye which registers these sights. Their presence as agents, she stresses, hardly registers at all. Therefore, if there is a description of the cold season, the cold is only presented chiefly as a fact about the weather, and not as a discomfort endured by the travelers.<sup>211</sup> For Clark, the landscape seduces with her wild charms, it is so different from the menacing jungles of earlier descriptions:

...How we learned to love the soft, fleecy clouds resting quietly in deep, dark glens, or sending their vapory sheets creeping up the hillsides in charming contrast to the dark blue mountaintops! How grandly solemn too, in a storm!...<sup>212</sup>

She tries to explain about the weather of this strange hilly region, so different from America, or even the plains of Assam:

...In all this mountainous region the humidity of the tropics prevails, but without the oppression of the air of the plains. The maximum temperature during the rains varies in different localities from seventy-eight degrees Fahrenheit to eighty-eight degrees, and during the cold season the minimum is from forty degrees to fifty degrees, according to the difference in elevation. For four months or more, successive bright, sunny days with clear, dark blue skies give a delightful climate...<sup>213</sup>

Even in this remote landscape, one can find familiar vegetation growing in abundance along with the unfamiliar and exotic. However, even the familiar and commonplace assumes such

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<sup>210</sup> Clark. 35.

<sup>211</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 141-2.

<sup>212</sup> Clark. 36.

<sup>213</sup> Clark.

an exotic aspect that one can hardly recognize them. This is a prelapsarian state of nature, a wild Eden that is beautiful and sublime, yet unfamiliar:

...Orchids, rhododendrons, beautifully colored begonias... abound in great variety and luxuriance. The hollycock, elder, gentian, morning glory, lady slipper, blue bell, the English violet, lilies, and other homeland flowers are here found of such gigantic growth as hardly to be recognized, and one is often pleased to find himself beneath the welcome shade of the familiar oak, walnut, or other well-known trees...<sup>214</sup>

That the land and the people, though wild and savage, can be tamed is evident in the observation she makes below. It is the metaphor of a space and a people that can be harnessed, formed and cultivated, a place full of potential for the pioneer:

...The Nagas give very little attention to the cultivation of fruit, but nature, as if to show the people luscious possibilities in this line, has bestowed a liberal variety of wild fruits in the jungle... it is probable that most of the products of the temperate zone could be grown on the higher elevations...<sup>215</sup>

And then she goes on to provide very rudimentary observations of the food crops, agricultural implements, the quality of soil, natural minerals found in the land and so on. She observes, “Coal, iron and petroleum are found in considerable quantities, but they have not yet become articles of commerce,” and “there is a limited trade in rubber.” Mary Clark also mentions the “troublesome” elephants, wild boars, monkeys, tigers and leopards that occasionally wreck havoc on the rice cultivations and other livestock. This inhospitable land, continually plagued by wild animals however assumes the semblance of a mythical past when she mentions that “there is a tradition that the unicorn once roamed over these hills.” Thus it becomes easier to define these unmapped hills by its appropriation of a western mythical creature for the benefit of the western audience.

According to Marie Louise Pratt, a “discursive division of labour” is common to much travel writing where the main narrative deals with landscape while indigenous people are

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<sup>214</sup> Clark. 37.

<sup>215</sup> Clark.

represented separately in descriptive portraits. In such kind of writing, the “face of the country” is presented chiefly in sweeping prospects that open before, or beneath the traveler’s eye. Such panoramic views, Pratt says, are an important commonplace of European aesthetics. Such views, she continues, may acquire and serve to familiarize meanings they may not have on the domestic front, whereby a fantasy of dominance is commonly built into this stance. To quote:

...The eye “commands” what falls within its gaze; the mountains “show themselves” or “present themselves”; the country “opens up” before the European newcomer, as does the unclothed indigenous bodyscape. At the same time, this eye seems powerless to act or interact with this landscape. Unheroic, unparticularized, without ego, interest, or desire of its own, it seems able to do nothing but gaze from a periphery of its own creation, like the self-effaced, noninterventionist eye that scans the Other’s body...<sup>216</sup>

Anna Johnston states that India was a highly productive field of missionary textual production for a variety of reasons. Drawing illustrations from the British missionary societies to India active during the nineteenth century, she argues that early missionaries in India needed to feel that they had the support of the British public. Also, India proved to be a culture of such fascinating, although abhorrent difference from British experience, that what could be defined as early ‘ethnographic’ narratives were readily produced by missionary observers and widely circulated to the reading public.<sup>217</sup>

Likewise, Patricia Hill in talking about the American Women’s Foreign Mission Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mentions missionary letters and journal entries that “fill the bulk of the pages in the early numbers of all the women’s magazines” during the 1870’s. She adds that missionary accounts testified to actual conditions encountered in foreign lands, lending credence to appeals made by organizers at home. While sermons and homilies could be safely left to men, a female audience’s attention could be better held by descriptions of people and exotic customs. According to Hill, this worked on

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<sup>216</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 142-3.

<sup>217</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 80.



the underlying assumption that women respond to personal and particular need, not abstract discussion of the eschatological implications of world evangelization.<sup>218</sup>

Mary Mead Clark echoes this dynamics in her Preface:

...It is sent forth with the earnest prayer that the young men and women who may chance to read it will not only be entertained, but moved to action on behalf of the savage tribes whose habits, customs, and possibilities are depicted from personal observation through many years...<sup>219</sup>

### **Narrating Anthropology**

As mentioned earlier, the Clarks were the first people of European descent to venture to the Naga Hills with the exception of a few futile attempts by military personnel of the British India government. One of the earliest existing account where the Nagas are mentioned is the 1855 *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, During a Residence of Fourteen Years* by Major John Butler, the then Principal Agent to the Governor of Assam. Major Butler's expeditions (ostensibly for the purposes of surveying and mapping) to the Hills chiefly among the Angami Nagas led him to the exasperated conclusion that:

...an indiscriminate destruction of Nagah villages cannot be contemplated – especially if we decide on retaining possession of the country – as we should, by such a proceeding, destroy our resources...I therefore, beg leave to suggest that, for the future, we leave the Nagahs entirely to themselves, and wholly abstain from any interference with them...<sup>220</sup>

Unfortunately for Butler, his suggestion to the government to abstain from any interference with the Nagas must have been ignored. Mary Clark mentions in her book about the death of the Principal Agent:

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<sup>218</sup> Hill. 103-4.

<sup>219</sup> Clark. Preface.

<sup>220</sup> Butler, Major John. *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, During a Residence of Fourteen Years*. Rpt. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2004. 202. Print.

...The English government are still smarting from the recent rout of a large survey party sent to reconnoiter this territory and the brutal murder of Captain Butler with one of his native soldiers...<sup>221</sup>

Susan Bassnett comments on the tendency of nineteenth century travel writers both male and female to reflect certain contradictions in their works. For instance “they moved secure in the knowledge of their own superiority, quick to patronise or mock,” yet they were ready to “bear witness to what they saw as exploitation and cruelty by fellow Europeans and North Americans.” However she remarks that on balance, “the nineteenth century travel texts by men tend towards a greater scientificity, while much of the women’s writing reflects an interest in philanthropic activities, characteristic of early feminism.”<sup>222</sup>

Perhaps the most definitive works on the Nagas were written by colonial agents. J.P Mills, an anthropologist and administrator in the Hills compiled *The Lhota Nagas* (1922), *The Ao Nagas* (1926) and *The Rengma Nagas* (1937). Another associate and contemporary of Mills, J.H Hutton, also of the Indian Civil Service and an Oxford anthropologist, wrote the two books, *The Angami Nagas* and *The Sema Nagas* in 1921. Though the depth and scientific nature of *A Corner in India* cannot be compared on an equal footing to these obviously professional accounts, it can be assumed without doubt that in Mary Mead Clark’s era, the prospect of collecting and recording information about the Nagas was a terrain relatively unexplored. Thus, we may look upon her work as the precursor to the activities of information-gathering that would engulf the Hills in the early twentieth century by colonial agents. To say that Mary Clark was conscious in her role as the first visitor and recorder of the Hills would be an understatement.

The next four chapters of her work can be seen as an anthropological effort by the writer to define and categorize the Nagas as a savage community, and to present them as objects of fascination and curiosity to the western readers. The title of the four chapters clearly speak for themselves as, “The Savage at Home,” “Savage Oratory and Visiting Cards,” “The Savage in Costume and at Work,” and “Savage Worship and Strange Legends.” Marie Louise Pratt in her essay “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the

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<sup>221</sup> Clark. 16.

<sup>222</sup> Bassnett, Susan. “Travel Writing and Gender.” *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Eds. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 228. Print.

Land of the Bushmen” declares that a narrative which uses the portrait of the manners and customs is a normalizing discourse. The work of such a discourse is to fix the Other in a timeless present where all “his” actions and reactions are repetitions of “his” normal habits. It thus textually produces the Other without an explicit anchoring either in an observing self or in a particular encounter in which contact with the Other takes place. However she says that in the case of travel writing, manners-and-customs description is always in play with other sorts of representation that also bespeak difference and position subjects in their own ways. Sometimes these other positionings complement the ideological project of normalizing description, and sometimes they do not.<sup>223</sup> Mary Clark thus utilizes the manners and customs narrative device in “Savage Oratory and Visiting Cards” as we see in the example below:

...At inter-village councils the speakers exhibit considerable oratorical power, and but one is allowed to speak at a time. Arranging his gay blanket over the right shoulder, he has free use of his arm for gesticulation, and improves the opportunity without stint or hindrance. In his right hand he holds his spear, and at the close of an important statement gives emphasis by thrusting into the ground in front of him...<sup>224</sup>

In her essay “Writing the Southern Cross: Religious Travel writing in Nineteenth- Century Australasia,” Anna Johnston shows how religious travel writing participated in representations of the other. Such a device in religious writing, Johnston emphasizes, is a prerequisite in the trope of evangelizing the native. Religious travel, says Johnston, must first identify other, ‘heathen’ cultures and natures, and then seek to transform them into European, Christian archetypes. This is essential, she says, both to justify the travel impetus and the religious interventions that each journey/narrative seeks to engender in its home audience.<sup>225</sup>

In *Frontiers of Femininity*, Karen Morin examines how a group of ‘elite’ women travel writers wrote about western native peoples, especially Native American women, during encounters with them at sites along the western rail lines 1879–90. She notes that British women travelers and western Indians (the American Indians) became emblematic of a whole range of social-spatial relationships of domination, subordination, complicity, and resistance.

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<sup>223</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 139-140.

<sup>224</sup> Clark. 39-40.

<sup>225</sup> Johnston. *Writing the Southern Cross*. 209.

According to her, judgments about racial and gender difference in these accounts can be traced to British Victorian colonial discourses, as well as to the social relations inherent in the multiple contact zones within which the encounters took place. Various representations of Native Americans appear in the texts, ranging from revulsion at Native savagery; to romanticization of the primitive but vanishing American; to moralistic, reform-minded concern for the abused “squaw” and her corollary, the Indian Princess; to a recognition of Native peoples’ self-definition and self-determination.<sup>226</sup>

Indeed, the similarities between the Nagas and the North American Indians seem to have been greeted with a sense of familiarity by the missionary Rev. C. D. King in his letter:

...There is much that suggests a comparison with our own North American Indians, as they were in the days of their prowess. Human skulls here are as honorable trophies as ever were scalps to the American savage...<sup>227</sup>

Mary Clark reproduces images of the fortifications and the layout of the entrance to a typical Naga village, planned and built primarily for the purpose of warfare and defence. She provides an illustration of the main approaches to the villages, “exceedingly pretty, and often quite imposing,” and evidently the villagers take great pride in them, “hoping to impress strangers with their numbers, strength and enterprise.”<sup>228</sup> While talking about the ditches or moats “studded with sharp bamboo spikes” “corresponding to a dry moat in English fortifications,” to “render impossible the rapid escape of enemies” she injects a light-hearted note of irony by commenting that “quick work was made of them (the enemies), and the village skull house lavishly replenished.”<sup>229</sup>

Nevertheless, the censorious note is particularly evident in her observations regarding the “Morung” or traditional Naga dormitory for bachelors, and a centre of cultural, social and political activity for all male members that had come of age. A boy’s initiation into the world of adults started with his inception into the Morung community, and this fraternal tie would continue till the event of his death. Mary Mead Clark as a visitor overlooks the centrality of

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<sup>226</sup> Morin, Karen M. *Frontiers of Femininity: A New Historical Geography of the Nineteenth-Century American West*. New York: Syracuse UP, 2008.138-9. Print.

<sup>227</sup> Clark. 103.

<sup>228</sup> Clark. 40.

<sup>229</sup> Clark.

the Morung in a village community predominantly concerned with the masculine preoccupations of hunting and warfare. She demotes this monument to a “barracks” as she writes:

...Within and near the gates were the “barracks” for unmarried warriors, abounding in unmistakable evidences of an uncivilized and barbarous people...<sup>230</sup>

Incidentally, women were not allowed into the Morung, it was strictly a “men’s only” milieu. Not only does she censure the Morung and its associations, she breaks all customary codes by penetrating into this male space. To take it further, it is not the enclosed female space or the harem that she is attempting to appropriate here, since such an appropriation cannot take place in a society which does not practise such enclosures of feminine spaces. Whether she actually enters into this sanctified male space or whether her information is obtained from a secondary source is not mentioned, but her description does add to the demystification of this jealously guarded male space. She is, after all a woman belonging to a perceived superior culture, more masterful than the crude male savages and hence can break tradition and custom with nonchalance. Thus, she gazes at a space which has been denied even to the native women. Incidentally, she does not mention that the inner sanctity of a Morung is a no-woman’s land. Here, she presents the interior of a Morung with the casual curiosity of an observer:

...On the great central post (and one might wonder how such a giant timber could be brought by hand from its home in the forest) were carved very good representations of men, elephants, tigers, leopards, all highly colored in gray, yellow, black, and red; while skins of the favourite hornbill, lizards, snakes, and skulls— human and imitation— found a place in the various decorations...<sup>231</sup>

Her all-seeing eye then observes the nocturnal and daytime activities of the Morung community:

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<sup>230</sup> Clark. 41.

<sup>231</sup> Clark.

...The young warriors slept with their battle- axes for pillows and their spears close at hand. Extra spear shafts and large quantities of torch materials were kept in readiness. On a large platform outside guards sat smoking and lazily amusing themselves throughout the day; village courts and political councils were held here...<sup>232</sup>

Bernard Cohn talks about the appropriation of power by Europeans by defining and classifying space, making separations between public and private spheres and legitimizing and outlawing activities. In the process of codification, the documentation that was involved created and normalized a vast amount of information, undertaken with the assumption that vast new worlds could be comprehended using western modes of knowing and thinking, and known and represented as a series of facts. In the process of codification and documentation, the imperial powers invaded and conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well. Cohn talks about a number of modalities that were adopted by the colonial power in their quest to define the subjects, for instance “The Observational/ Travel Modality.” This modality involved the creation of a repertoire of images and typifactions that determined what was significant to the European eye. A formula of familiarity was thus invoked by “following predetermined itineraries and seeing the sites in predictable ways.”<sup>233</sup>

Mary Clark, while trying to define and represent the “savage at home,” describes a discernible presence of dirt, squalor and uncleanness all around the village, a consistent feature with European narratives while talking about the Other. Traditional ways of lives, traditional forms of knowledge and native behaviour are often mocked, parodied and implicitly resented. Native husbandry is portrayed as a feeble and unproductive attempt often:

...occasionally below the houses may be found a wee enclosure for a few vegetables, but these are not numerous, as cows, pigs, and fowls have right of way... the first room, answering to a front hall, extending crosswise, has an earth floor, and is furnished with a large wooden mortar for hulling rice. The pig

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<sup>232</sup> Clark.

<sup>233</sup> Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. 3-6. Print.

trough is here, and here the domestic animals pass the night, although Mr. Cock and Mrs. Hen usually perch farther on in the family room...<sup>234</sup>

According to Karen Morin, the women traveller's account of the Native American Indians, whether encountered within the close confines of railway stations, or from a more detached position outside a moving train, appeared as aesthetic components of the passing western landscape, racialized in their dress, manner, and hygiene. She continues that the recurring obsession in traveler's texts with "dirt, matted hair, and untidiness can be understood within the larger discourses of racial cleanliness circulating among nineteenth-century bourgeois Europeans."<sup>235</sup>

Clark goes on to a description of the rudimentary Naga bedsteads:

...Near the fire stand the bedsteads, which are also utilized for seats during the day... the bedsteads may only be a few bamboos placed closely on a frame or a solid plank with legs and pillow formed in the hewing. These are the favourite styles, and anything soft seems never to have been thought of, even for the sick...<sup>236</sup>

This reference to the hardness of the bedstead and the Naga's inability to imagine anything softer even for sick people seems unfair, as she is trying to impose her ideals of western comfort on a people who are utilizing the only meagre resources available to them in their harsh mountainous region. She then illustrates an anecdote to demonstrate the deplorable condition of the people, with some humour and irony:

...On one occasion when there was an alarm of fire a young man, seriously ill, was brought into the mission bungalow, laid upon a mattress and given a pillow. Recovering a little from the shock the poor fellow exclaimed, "So soft! So soft!" while his attendants declared that such ease would "break" their sleep...<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Cohn. 42-43.

<sup>235</sup> Morin. 148.

<sup>236</sup> Clark. 44.

<sup>237</sup> Clark.

How then does Mary Clark deal with the question of women? Eliza Brown's duties as a helpmeet extended largely to evangelizing and converting native women fully conversant with the ethos of "rescuing native women." In Mary Clark's account, there is surprisingly little or no mention of women. In fact, her account is remarkable for its steady focus on the male natives. Even in this line, which can be perceived as one of the first specific references to women in the book, the representation is comic and unsympathetic:

...rows of women, each hunting pygmy foes in the hair of the one immediately in front of her, is a familiar sight...<sup>238</sup>

When she mentions women in the next chapter "Savage Oratory and Visiting cards," they are portrayed as instrumental in emphasizing the "ambition for fame and glory that lurks even to this day in the Naga's breast." The women are not portrayed as pawns or victims in the constant battles the Nagas fought with outsiders or with each other, but they are shown as part of a community that has internalized hardships and are used to the constant travails of war:

...Women and children in groups brought wood down from the jungles and water from the springs far down the hillsides, never going singly, as the lower springs were favourite lurking places for enemies seeking human heads. Mothers, on leaving for their work, charged the older children, on the first alarm of war, to seize the little ones and flee at once to some hiding place in the jungle...<sup>239</sup>

Contrary to what Anna Johnston calls "a standard narrative pattern," where studies construct a historical narrative tracing the 'plight' of Indian women from ancient times, critically focusing on the negative aspects,<sup>240</sup> the native women in Mary Clark's account are not victims but instead fierce instigators urging their men on to war, they are in fact even shown as responsible for the martial attitude of their men:

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<sup>238</sup> Clark.

<sup>239</sup> Clark. 46.

<sup>240</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 83.



...The heads of women and children counted as much as those of men, the long black hair of women being especially prized for decorations...men were dubbed women or cows until they had contributed to the village skull-house. Young maidens instigated their betrothed to this bloody work, and it was woman's voice that trilled the cry of victory when these prizes reeking in blood were brought into the village...<sup>241</sup>

In fact, the Naga women seemed to have been more of an irritant to the writer, who identifies them as one of the obstacles in the advancement of Christianity:

...There was difficulty in early persuading the women that this new religion was for them as well as for their husbands and sons, and thus they were a decided hindrance to the extension of Christianity in the village...<sup>242</sup>

The repetitive narratives of British ethnographic 'knowledge' about Indian culture and gender relations, asserts Anna Johnston, emanate from the complex negotiations of evangelical Christianity and acquisitive colonialism which mark missionary work in India.<sup>243</sup>

Mary Clark's account is unfortunately, not free from excessive generalisations and superficial knowledge which she proposes to pass off as social historiography. Without considering the distinctiveness of each Naga tribes in their customs and practices, she tries to define and essentialize the Nagas by simply stating, "There is no degradation of women among the Nagas." While her first error might be one of generalization, she commits the second oversight by her assumption that there is an equality of the sexes in this tribal society. Overlooking all discrepancies, the writer provides a superficial observation, though in the same breath she continues that women do not participate "directly in civil or military administration..."<sup>244</sup>

In "The Savage in Costume and at Work," Mary Clark acquaints the readers with some basic customs of Naga life. About marriage she mentions, "marriage is celebrated by the bridegroom simply by taking his bride to a new home, but in well-to-do families a feast is

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<sup>241</sup> Clark. 47.

<sup>242</sup> Clark. 72.

<sup>243</sup> Johnston. *Missionary Writing*. 83.

<sup>244</sup> Clark. 49.

served and wedding presents bestowed.”<sup>245</sup> This over-simplification is made in the usual manner of a visitor passing superficial observations and noting them down as the norm. When she makes these simplifications, it is an example of an outsider dismissing, rejecting, or ignoring the native customs and practices that are incomprehensible to her. For, while there might have not been a ceremony of matrimonial alliance in parallel to the western model, the generally accepted practice among the Ao-Nagas in contracting marriages included rituals such as interpreting dreams, omens, observing of fasts and the mandatory gift of fish by the prospective groom to the bride’s family. Only then could a marriage agreement be arrived at between the two parties.

Concerning the question of remarriage, she comments in her inimitable style that, “remarriage in less than two or three years after the death of a husband or wife is not considered good form.” As far as divorce is concerned, “the usual cause of divorce is adultery, but failure on the part of the wife to become a mother is considered a justifiable reason for parting.”<sup>246</sup> Such a statement clearly contradicts her stance about the favourable status of Naga women. She further contradicts herself by remarking that:

...But there is real work for the women. While men do the heaviest part of the cultivation, they share in preparing the land, seed sowing, weeding and harvesting the crops...the life of the Naga woman is hard— hard from the character of much of her work, but worse from exposure in all kinds of weather, sparse clothing, and poor diet...<sup>247</sup>

The most interesting feature about the above quoted statement is that harsh climate, topography and dietary habits are identified as the causes responsible for the drudgery of the women. Any imbalance in the distribution of work between men and women, or the status of the women as much inferior social beings are not considered into the reckoning for the overworked plight of native women.

Regarding their dietary habits she adds:

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<sup>245</sup> Clark.

<sup>246</sup> Clark. 50.

<sup>247</sup> Clark. 51.

...The diet of the women, always meagre, is further limited after the tattooing. Very few women eat flesh, except fish, and none use eggs or milk. Their food is largely rice and coarse vegetables. All drink rice beer...<sup>248</sup>

The voice advocating for the upliftment of native women, so distinctly apparent in the letters of Eliza Brown is conspicuous by its absence in Mary Mead Clark. When Mary describes the compulsory tattooing ritual to mark a girl's coming-of-age, without any note of censoriousness she makes a brief and abrupt reference to female slavery as, "Every Naga woman who is not sold into slavery when young has a pair of indigo blue striped stockings, which last a lifetime, tattooed in the skin."<sup>249</sup> Such a disinterested reference to slavery is more unconventional when considered with the civil rights movement gathering momentum in contemporary American society, especially among the missionary circles. Some of the American Baptist missionaries in Assam were noted and vocal abolitionists, for instance Nathan Brown, who joined the Anti-slavery movement in America after his retirement from missionary service in Assam. This steadfast refusal to engage in discourses of social upliftment of women of the east, so much in vogue among foreign travellers and missionaries, is remarkable in Mary Clark's account. That is why, at times, her narrative comes across merely as the casual disinterested observations of a visitor.

That this savage tribe of people did not prove so difficult to evangelise and convert owed to the fact that they did not follow any of the established formalised religion such as Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism. Their homespun belief was native animism, and for the missionaries, this lack of a codified precedent rendered them more promising and easier subjects than the plains-dwellers of Assam:

...Religiously, these hill people south of Assam, not being grounded in the old systematized religions of the East, and having no caste, are far more ready to accept the simple story of Jesus of Nazareth...<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Clark. 53.

<sup>249</sup> Clark. 53.

<sup>250</sup> Clark. 57.

## Mapping a New Religion

As far as the missionaries were concerned, the apparent “lack” of history or the prevalence of “blank spaces” among these people offered up untold possibilities. Native customs, traditions and beliefs were aggressively erased and the slate was wiped clean from memory for the writing of a new religious history. In this case, history could not be re-written, since the Nagas had no written language or record. Their belief systems were just ‘scratches’ on the face of religion, to borrow Marie Louise Pratt’s term. This “lack” of an established religious history prompts the writer to declare that, “the Nagas, once civilized and Christianized, will make a manly, worthy people.”<sup>251</sup> The beginning of this enterprise can be seen in the establishment of Molung, the new Christian colony, and the demonization of all the old ways of life. One can even say that it can be discerned in the writer’s nonchalant and dismissive attitude while talking about “savage” anthropology. Thus, it was a deliberate attempt to oust from memory the recollections of a pre-Christian past. Any references, if articulated, are done solely for the purpose of contrasting the legible bright present with a murky dark past. And thus a representation of a religious historiography of the Nagas came to be constructed.

The explicit project of explorer-writers whether scientists or not, according to Pratt, is to produce what they referred to as “information,” to incorporate a particular reality into a series of interlocking information orders like aesthetic, geographic, mineralogical, botanical, agricultural etc to such an extent that it strives to efface itself, the invisible eye/I strives to make those informational orders natural, to find them there uncommanded, rather than assert them as the products/producers of European knowledges or discipline. She further adds that “nineteenth-century exploration writing enjoins two planetary processes that had been ideologically sundered: the expansion of the knowledge edifice of natural history and the expansion of the capitalist world system.”<sup>252</sup>

The knowledge of the orientalist, Ronald Inden says, appears as rational, logical, scientific, realistic and objective. By contrast the knowledge of Orientals often seems irrational, illogical, unscientific, unrealistic and subjective. Therefore, according to him, the knowledge of the orientalist is privileged in relation to that of the Orientals, and it invariably places itself in a relationship of intellectual dominance over that of the Easterns. Such knowledge has

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<sup>251</sup> Clark. 45.

<sup>252</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 144.

appropriated the power to represent the Oriental, to translate and explain Oriental thoughts and acts not only to Europeans and Americans, but to the Orientals themselves too.<sup>253</sup>

The chapter “Savage Worship and Savage Legends” simplifies the pre-Christian beliefs of the Nagas, but at the same time, tries to draw some similar points of reference between the beliefs of the dark past with the discourse of Christianity. This is evidently a device adopted to effortlessly incorporate some acceptable facets of the animist beliefs with the Christian doctrines, and also a device to simplify the teachings of Christianity to the unsophisticated savage minds.

In Ashcroft’s words, “as a child, the colonial subject is both inherently evil and potentially good, submerging the moral conflict of colonial occupation and locating in the child of empire a naturalization of the ‘parents’ own contradictory impulses for exploitation and nurture.”<sup>254</sup>

The careful reconstruction and assimilation of native animist belief with Christianity begins with similarities in the definitions of “sin”:

...The Aos define sin as “unclean,” “foul,” “a stain,” “a spot,” and greatly abhor anything they denominate sin. They live in great dread and fear of it, and cleansing from sin is costly both in sacrifices and time...<sup>255</sup>

Some legends, beliefs and folk-lore of the Ao’s were duly selected and illustrated as proof that they possessed some ancient memory about the Tree of Life, Noah’s flood and the concept of “hell”:

...from the abundant folk-lore of the Aos the following came to us... a knowledge of the tree of life perished among the Aos...in directing our attention to a certain prominent mountain peak, the people have told us that in the submerging of the whole world ages ago this elevation alone remained above the surging waters. Have these people some tradition of the true flood? The idea

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<sup>253</sup> Inden. 37-8.

<sup>254</sup> Ashcroft. 36.

<sup>255</sup> Clark. 59.

too is advanced that in the last days men will be filled with all manner of wickedness, and that everything will be consumed in a great world conflagration...<sup>256</sup>

A “crude memory” reminiscent of the story of creation and the judgement day is also eagerly accepted by the missionary as fact that the Nagas would make natural Christians:

...They also have a tradition that in the earliest period after creation man and all animate beings lived in peace, and that in the last days man will become degenerate and all on earth will be consumed...<sup>257</sup>

Mary Clark presents the age-old tendency of the Nagas to offer up gifts to their gods, and interestingly this ancient heathenish habit is not frowned upon by the missionaries but rather encouraged and approved. This is another interesting instance of how the new religion managed to integrate some facets of the old belief, as long as they were useful to the world-view of the missionaries:

...It was customary with the heathen Ao Nagas to accompany every act of worship with a gift. Consequently not very much instruction was required to induce the people to contribute of their means for religious purposes, and to lay aside at daily meals a small gift for the Lord’s work...<sup>258</sup>

Karen Morin says that the western travel writer appears to place value on the primitive, and yet simultaneously codes white culture as superior. She says, “...to the reform-minded traveler, attributes of quality, refinement, dignity, respectability and even aesthetically white characteristics, signal that reform is possible.” At the same time, primitiveness and crudity signal that reform is necessary.<sup>259</sup>

The ability to achieve transitions with the minimum amount of discomfort has been one of the prerogatives available to imperial powers or their representatives. Much effort was taken

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<sup>256</sup> Clark. 61-63.

<sup>257</sup> Clark. 63.

<sup>258</sup> Clark. 91.

<sup>259</sup> Morin. 153.

to separate acceptable forms of native knowledge and beliefs from unacceptable heathenish practices, and some elements of the heathen were imbued with a sense of familiarity.

Along with these re-constructions and appropriations of native customs and beliefs, there was a deliberate and steady process of deconstruction of the same. As practicing animists, the Ao Nagas invested a spiritual entity on the rocks, trees and streams encompassing their habitat:

...The Aos attribute a spiritual existence and supernatural power to all their deities. Certain rocks and pools are regarded as their abode, and are reverently and cautiously passed...<sup>260</sup>

And therefore it was the duty of the missionary to break the tie between the past and the present, to belittle past practices and destroy any memory of resultant nostalgia for the past in the savage minds.

Relating an incident that threatened to drag up a recollection of the old beliefs, Mary Clark attributes the heroic role to the character of her husband, who manages to achieve the deconstruction of an age-old superstitious belief, rendering it ridiculous with one single commonsensical gesture:

...Mr. Clark enquired why the path at a certain point made such a sudden detour down the steep hillside. He was told that an enormous rock, standing vertically and alone and in which dwelt a mighty and influential spirit, was up there, and no one must pass that way...<sup>261</sup>

The missionary's response awes the villagers and serves at the same time, to completely destroy any hold that the old beliefs had on the new converts. It is a systematic deconstruction of an idea clung to dearly by the savages, where western religion is shown to triumph over the indigenous eastern beliefs:

...Mr. Clark kept to the ridge, and to the amazement of his attendants walked back and forth unharmed before the sacred boulder. This direct and easy route,

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<sup>260</sup> Clark, 58.

<sup>261</sup> Clark.

close to his lordship's stony abode, was gradually more and more ventured upon, and ere long well cleared and opened as a public highway...<sup>262</sup>

However, while chronicling the history of Christianity in North- East India, Frederick Downs emphasizes that there was no radical discontinuity between Christianity and the old way of life for the native converts:

...Certainly the discontinuity between Christianity and the old way of life has not been so radical as the observers of town life in the hills areas must suppose. In a sense one can say that Christianity was understood in the same way that religion has always been understood....<sup>263</sup>

This statement seems to pre-suppose an assumption that modern life and modernity were pre-existing conditions in the hills, and that there was a tacit co-operation between the old beliefs and Christianity. Mary Mead Clark's account on the other hand, records a pre-modern people in a state of nature, governed only by wars, who had to be coaxed and persuaded again and again to conform to the new religion and way of life brought by the missionaries.

Such conflicting encounters between order and disorder, civilized and savage, western and eastern can only result in a complete overhaul and de-legitimation of all systems that do not conform to any Euro-American standard. Native rituals, knowledge and belief become suspect and even ineffectual. Bill Ashcroft talks about "imperial control over representation," where the "textual attitude" of the Orientalist produces an influential version of 'knowledge.' Such knowledge achieves the status of truth by virtue of the cultural power of the knower, and such 'truth' becomes an infinite rehearsal of tropes such as exoticism, mystery, cunning, deviousness, which all place the Oriental as the other of Europe.<sup>264</sup>

In due course of time, the Nagas started to look back to their past with increasing feelings of shame and guilt, soon to be followed by a vehement rejection of their secretive, dark, shameful lives before Christ. These symptoms are manifested when the missionaries visit a

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<sup>262</sup> Clark. 59.

<sup>263</sup> Downs. 167.

<sup>264</sup> Ashcroft. 36.



certain village and see “a strange little bamboo hut with bones of various animals and broken cooking pots strewed around.”<sup>265</sup> When they ask the villagers about this, they are told:

... “Oh! That is Leezaba’s (the evil deity’s) cookhouse.” The sacrifices made for him in the village for sickness and misfortune did not seem to avail, and this house had been built solely for him... “Tell us more,” they said. “Our minds are all dark; we have no torch to guide us”...<sup>266</sup>

To demonstrate further the triumph of Christianity over the heathens, Mary Clark reproduces extracts from a letter written by a fellow missionary, Rev. C. D. King to his brethren in America. King had visited the Clarks’ mission field in 1880 and wrote a glowing testimonial about the accomplishments of the Clarks among the Ao Nagas. He enthusiastically talks about a Naga called Imrong, who, according to him, was “the homeliest man in all the village,” a man who was once an ardent animist but had now been converted into the most devout Christian. King narrates the exchange between Imrong and Mr. Clark:

...Mr. Clark once asked him, “Imrong, do you make offerings to Leezaba nowadays when your wife or children are ill?” with those two great hands uplifted, and with an expression of horror, he exclaimed, “Never, father, never, no never!...”<sup>267</sup>

The complete reconstruction of a new Christian identity for the natives involves not only a total discarding of all things associated with the past, but a fervent denial of the old dark days. Native customs and relics are transformed into mere objects of curiosities, since all the covert native powers and taboos associated with them have been made ineffectual by the imposition of an ordered system. The past is shameful and also as treated with casual irreverence by the converts to this new order. On one occasion the Clarks were going round the village on one of their usual walks, and they see “a large, comfortable looking house with the entire front wall removed, and across this space, hung on bamboo poles, were men’s and women’s clothes, jewelry, skeins of yarn...”<sup>268</sup> On further enquiry, they were told that someone from the family had been carried off by a tiger and so, the house and all their

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<sup>265</sup> Clark. 95.

<sup>266</sup> Clark.

<sup>267</sup> Clark. 106-7.

<sup>268</sup> Clark. 113.

belongings had become tabooed, they had to be abandoned according to the dictates of the old religion. She narrates the incident as:

...Although desirous of obtaining these fine ornaments for curios, we hesitated, as to do so would cause us to become sinful in the eyes of the people. We consulted the officials. “Why, yes,” they said, “take them if you dare,” but we did not remove them until the time for our departure... on Mr. Clark’s showing them the jewelry in our little handbag one of our Christians immediately took it, the best possible proof of his sincerity in abandoning old-time customs...<sup>269</sup>

### **Reimagining the Savage**

A zeal of social reformation urged on by the missionaries took hold of the imaginations of the newly Christianized natives. Most notably, the temperance movement, a social reformist agenda of American evangelicals and suffragettes rapidly gained momentum in the hills among the youth. The passionate efforts of the native Christians in attacking all sorts of social vices which were once acceptable are happily shared by the writer:

...Every form of demon worship, open or suspected, was attacked— Sunday-breaking, open or suspected, rice-beer drinking, licentiousness, and all social vices. One after another of the young people were pressed into the ranks, and the White Ribbon Society, without the name, or buttonholes in which to wear the badge, grew in numbers and influence and power...<sup>270</sup>

While discoursing on “The Surveillance Modality” employed by the British to ensure loyalty and obedience from their subjects, Cohn remarks that there was a “colonial sociological theatre” where everyone, both the rulers and the ruled, had proper roles to play. Special instrumentalities were constructed to control those defined as beyond civil bounds, and special investigations were carried out to provide the criteria by which whole groups would be stigmatized as criminal.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Clark. 114.

<sup>270</sup> Clark. 138.

<sup>271</sup> Cohn. 10.

An air of change took over the hills with the induction of the youth in attacking everything of the old establishment that might threaten the growth of the new religion. In a sense, the new Christians became “God’s police,” ensuring that every visible forms of the ancient life would be stamped out:

...If a pig were to furnish the meal where these ‘white ribboners’ worked, they insisted upon its being killed in the village, lest, if slain on the field, suspicious persons might construe it as secretly appeasing a cultivation deity, and they would have none of this...<sup>272</sup>

Ranajit Guha lists three types of narratives in colonialist discourse— political histories, political economy, and regional reports. All three narratives, taken together as a genre, stand for the beginnings of a colonialist historiography of India and concern themselves primarily with production, landed value, revenue, traditional knowledge and so on. However, the Englishmen in the process of gathering and constructing the historiography and in spite of the contempt they held for indigenous knowledge, was not altogether free from “a fear of that unknown power of indigenous knowledge which made the European feel insecure,” the unmistakable sign of an ethnological encounter. For the western observer, according to Guha, whether traveler, adventurer, scientist, or administrator, regarded the withholding of an indigenous knowledge of any kind invariably as an assertion of ethnic identity, which excluded him. Therefore, the fear and sense of humiliation generated by the want of access to what he thought was his by virtue of an undefined racial, cultural, or spiritual superiority, or simply by right of conquest, could be compensated by generalizations about native character and society as devoid of all that stood for positive values in the alien’s own society and character.<sup>273</sup>

Mary Clark continues:

...Prayer meetings have been called for the sick, and there has been no small stir among the diviners and soothsayers, who are fast losing their gains... one of our young reformers has his house built and is all ready to receive his intended

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<sup>272</sup> Clark. 139.

<sup>273</sup> Guha, Ranajit. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. 160-62. Print.

bride, but he will not marry her until she promises – and practices too – to give up rice-beer drinking...<sup>274</sup>

A new religion necessitates a new way of life and this was the issue discussed among the missionaries in the Naga Hills at the “first rally of the churches” held at Molung in 1897. A blueprint to lead good Christian lives and to abstain from backsliding was laid out for the native converts. Inability or refusal to follow the set of rules would result in the shameful stigma of expulsion from the church. Mary Clark writes about the discussion of a number of themes during the rally such as:

...other topics were evangelization, the Holy Spirit, Christian benevolence, shall the Nagas bury their dead? Should all Christians learn to read? By what changes in food, houses, sanitation, and clothing shall Christians better their mode of living?...<sup>275</sup>

Karen Morin illustrates how reservation sites were set up for the Native Americans with certain objectives. She says that although the reservation system essentially separated the races, official government discourse articulated it as a policy that would ensure assimilation. It involved attempts to transform indigenous peoples into Christianized farmers and housewives who possessed a concept of private property according to European pattern.<sup>276</sup> In a similar vein, the mission efforts would seek to encourage a ‘mission compound mentality’ on the native Naga converts, instructing them on ways to “better their mode of living.” Conversion and the new religion brought a marked change in the lives of the new Christians, and they became active contributors to the material prosperity of the mission, as Mary Clark notes:

...Our last harvest home festival showed the largest amount of rice ever brought in on such an occasion. It was sold for fourteen rupees, almost five dollars. As we congratulated the people on being able to contribute so much more now than in the old war days, one replied, ‘why, yes, in the old war days, before we knew

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<sup>274</sup> Clark. 140.

<sup>275</sup> Clark. 143.

<sup>276</sup> Morin. 140.

the only true God and our new-found king Jesus, and kept Sabbath, we scarcely saw a pice...<sup>277</sup>

Anna Johnston illustrates how missionary figures are anomalous in a colonial environment, by quoting Ann Laura Stoler that they were an integral part of the philanthropic moralizing mission that defined bourgeois culture in the nineteenth century. According to Johnston, missionaries were always conscious of their ‘liminality’ and sought to consolidate their precarious position in colonial cultures by mimicking stereotypical imperial practices, for example of racial superiority. They rigidly enforced and encouraged colonial versions of them in their ‘heathen’ charges.<sup>278</sup>

Like all missionary narratives, one can easily find elements of the “before- after” examples in abundance. The transition from “before” to “after” is naturally rife with hesitant contacts between the old and the new, and more often the anecdotes that emerge out of these encounters are amusing. For instance, she describes reaction of the Nagas when the chapel was furnished with “benches”:

...The adjustment of the Nagas to these advanced accommodations was amusing. Some of the men looked for a moment, then stepped up on the seats and sat down on their feet. The women, a little more modest, stood, as if considering for a little what was most fitting to do...soon, however, all accommodated themselves to the new arrangement with no little merriment and with much appreciation...<sup>279</sup>

This gradual change in the portrait of the Naga from a blood-thirsty savage to an awkward recipient of civilizing effects corresponds with what Bernard Cohn discusses in “observational/travel modality.” He says that although the itineraries and the particular sites, social types, and encounters with India and Indians reported show considerable consistency, their representation changed through time. Ultimately, what is observed and reported is mediated by socio-political contexts as well as historically specific aesthetic principles.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Clark. 140.

<sup>278</sup> Johnston. *Writing the Southern Cross*. 9.

<sup>279</sup> Clark. 83.

<sup>280</sup> Cohn. 7.

The fixed textual entity of Edward Said's natives<sup>281</sup> do not seem to apply to missionary discourses, even while located in the context of colonialism since the basic premise of such missionary narratives is change. Such a plot only works when it operates under the idea of change, not fixidity, as it must always culminate in a happy ending with a moral lesson.

Not only did the missionary look after the spiritual welfare of the converts, but he undertook the arduous task of romanizing the Ao dialect and attempting to give the Ao's their first written literature. The Gospels of Matthew and John were translated into Ao by 1885, and still later on there were more additions to the meagre collection with the printing of "a new and enlarged collection of hymns, the history of Joseph, and more school books were added."<sup>282</sup>

A process of 'humanizing' the savage then begins with the introduction of books and literacy, seeking to enable these new Christians to read and write the gospel. However, it is not a smooth transition and only serves to reemphasize the amount of labour that is still required among the people.

Talking about colonization and the literacy agenda, Bill Ashcroft says:

...Literacy and education reinforce the existence of the very gap they are designed to close, the gap between colonizer and colonized, civilized and primitive; in short, the gap between adult and child. They do this because education is always on the terms of an adult consciousness to which the colonial subject can never aspire...<sup>283</sup>

The first brushes of the unlettered Nagas with books are recounted with much hilarity and pride by the writer:

...We can never tell our joy when the young men and women in our congregation began intelligently to handle the scriptures and hymn books! What did it matter if sometimes the books were held upside down by the older ones

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<sup>281</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Rpt. London: Routledge, 1980. Print.

<sup>282</sup> Clark. 109.

<sup>283</sup> Ashcroft. 39.

who did not wish to be outdone; their honest pride spoke volumes. Of what account were any sacrifices for this people now glad to have us with them and eager for the printed page!...<sup>284</sup>

The remaining chapters are comprised of enthusiastic reports of the success of the American Baptist Mission's initiation among the Ao Nagas. Such an accomplishment may have also been due to the fact that "in 1885 the English government assumed suzerainty over the Ao Naga tribe."<sup>285</sup> In her own words:

...A strong military force marched the length and breadth of Ao territory... "this is only a big raid to get filled up," they said; and, still set on honors won by spilling human blood, continued their petty warfares, ambushades, and plundering raids, involving costly English expeditions...not readily comprehending their true relations to this new order...<sup>286</sup>

In this new world order, confronted with the abstract idea of being subjects of a new entity, the Nagas looked to the only white man of authority that they trusted—the missionary. Mary describes these significant days in the lives of the Nagas with a measure of amusement:

...they asked: "who is this Rani (queen) that she should reign over us?" "Are not some of us of royal blood?" "Have not we kings?" Again and again there came ambassadors from different villages to counsel with Mr. Clark; some, cognizant of their own misdeeds, would plead for his intercession on their behalf, and all begged for a written testimony of their peaceable conduct and good-will. It was amusing to see what confidence they suddenly had in a written statement, though none of them could read...<sup>287</sup>

The savage found himself in an altered state of hopelessness, where the skills which were valuable to him formerly lost their usefulness and significance in defining himself as a proud warrior. A parallel can be drawn here to what Sara Johnson writes of the Christianized Polynesian society in the nineteenth century:

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<sup>284</sup> Clark. 109.

<sup>285</sup> Clark. 120.

<sup>286</sup> Clark.

<sup>287</sup> Clark.

...The structures imposed and facilitated by early nineteenth-century missionaries – marriage, institutionalized labour and trade – altered Polynesian society radically, according to the evangelical creeds of the missionaries, achieving its redemption from a fallen state or, according to critics, precipitating its Fall from innocence to the tainted level of so-called civilization...<sup>288</sup>

Due to the punitive actions carried out by the British army in the Naga Hills, the people suffered much loss as entire villages and crops were burnt or destroyed. Finally in April 1889, “the Ao tribe was formally annexed to the British territory, all the villages officially visited, houses counted and revenue collected.”<sup>289</sup> The presence of the flag provided great relief to the missionaries, who had always felt insecure among the heathens in the Hills. Mrs. Clark notes with relief and approval these new set of developments:

...From 1876 we had lived in this land of hostilities without the protection of a Christian government...until this final act of incorporation into the Indian empire there was great unrest and destruction. Now, the earnest prayers of years were answered, and these mountain paths, so long tracked by blood, were open for the coming of the messengers of the Prince of Peace...<sup>290</sup>

With the relative peace and security provided by the presence of the British, the mission enterprise among the Ao Nagas saw an unprecedented growth in a matter of time. Soon, other missionaries were recruited from America in order to settle in Naga inhabited areas such as the Kohima mission among the Angamis and the Wokha mission with the Lothas. There is no mistaking the note of an expansionist and ambitious mission agenda when Mary Clark envisions a “grand trunk line” of missions in the Naga Hills:

...A bridle path to the plains made Wokha accessible, rendering still more desirable this connecting link between the Angamis and Aos. With Kohima, sixty miles southwest, already occupied, also Molung, ninety miles northeast, a grand trunk line of missions to the Nagas would soon be opened. The

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<sup>288</sup> Johnson. *Missionary Positions*. 180.

<sup>289</sup> Clark. 126.

<sup>290</sup> Clark. 126-7.



importance of an early occupation of this field had already been pressed upon the Missionary Union...<sup>291</sup>

Perhaps the rhetoric of progress and conquer is even more palpable as she declares with candour the wide-reaching ambitions of her all seeing-eye:

...From the beginning it was never contemplated stopping alone with these tribes bordering on the frontier; but on and on, conquering and to conquer, beyond and still beyond, until these mountains should be spanned and the kingdom of our Lord extended from the Brahmaputra to the Irawady to the Yangtse...<sup>292</sup>

The rest of the chapters are an interesting study of the relentless expansion of the mission not only in Molung but throughout the Ao villages in the hills, necessitating the establishment of a proper mission headquarters for the native Christians, and where a formal training of native Christians would be undertaken at the Impur Training School. The writer records this historic event:

...we had left much; we had come to much...Impur is an ideal, picturesque location, a little over four thousand feet altitude, with pretty rolling lands... from our crest we look on peaks and peaks beyond...the missionaries named the place Impur, meaning in Naga dialect chieftown, a center, from which even now the light of the cross is shining afar...<sup>293</sup>

Much in the attitude of an eye, gazing and looking down, and at the same time appropriating as far as it can see, the rest of her narrative looks back at the beginning of mission history in the hills. She provides localized examples of mission success stories and finally ends with the joyfully narrated chapter “Homeward Bound.” Arguably, missionary rhetoric of conquest and expansion cannot be judged at an equal level with imperial expansionist policies. The former has to do with the discourse of “God’s Empire” and the latter concerns itself with temporal and political concerns of conquest. However, when missionary rhetoric allies itself with a

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<sup>291</sup> Clark. 150.

<sup>292</sup> Clark. 135.

<sup>293</sup> Clark. 146.

temporal colonizing power, when such narratives undertake to re-map the lived realities of a population and when devices of deconstruction and reconstruction are employed in the representation of a historiography, such gestures become meaningful traumatic events, for better or worse, to the subject Other.

Mary Clark leaves the Naga Hills for the last time in 1901, accompanied by her husband. She recounts her elation as she goes back home never to return:

...Our second embarkation was on the old-established steamship line, the “P. and O.,” from which we landed safely in old England. Then just a little “run across,” and home, home, home! If you want to know the meaning of that dear word be a missionary...<sup>294</sup>

Rev. Edward Clark would return to the Naga Hills in 1904 and complete 42 years of missionary service in Assam, of which 35 years were spent among the Ao Nagas. He finally left the hills for good and returned to America in 1911.

## Conclusion

Mary Clark’s *A Corner in India* gives one an over-all impression of unprecedented success of the American Baptist Mission among the Ao Nagas. It is a story of a dark and formless land moulded into form, a tale about the re-imagining of a “wild savage” into a blue-ribbon wearing Christian. The blank spaces are successfully filled, and the terrible war-cries are replaced by joyful songs of praise. The stances of conquest and expansion become even more pronounced as the writer presents self-congratulatory myriad representations of startling transformations. Given that missionary rhetoric of conquest and expansion assume very different reverberations to that of other imperial or colonial agendas, it would be stretching the point to see every Euro-American missionary account of “natives” as suspect. Nevertheless in Contact Zones, missionary narratives do sometimes overtly mimic or assume stances of aggressive expansionist policies of the temporal variety, threatening to dismiss the legitimate experiences of the “before” story in favour of the “after” story.

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<sup>294</sup> Clark. 161.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *FURTHER LEAVES FROM ASSAM:* JESSIE MOORE'S POLYPHONIC NOTES

Jessie Traver was born in Sand Lake, New York, in November 1857. There is not much material available about her early life and circumstances before Assam, but from her own accounts, it is apparent that she belonged to a family deeply interested in, and involved with missions. She married Pitt Holland Moore in July 1879 and the newly-weds set sail for Assam in October of the same year, to serve as active missionaries in the Nowgong mission for the next three decades.

Her husband Pitt Moore, or the Rev P.H. Moore as he was more familiarly known, came from a family with a reputation for missionary service in Asia. In the obituary, "P. H. Moore: An Appreciation" by G. G. Crozier in April 1916, he is described as "honored by government, loved by his fellow-men, called to rest by his master, a man of tender heart, Rev. Pitt Holland Moore, M. A., K.I.H., laid down his work March 3, 1916, after a little over thirty-six years of active missionary service."<sup>295</sup> His father, the Rev. Calvin C. Moore, was also a missionary in Akyab, Arracan, Burma where Pitt Moore was born. Pitt Moore served in Assam along with his brother Penn E. Moore, who was stationed in the Mikir Hills, in present day karbi Anglong, Assam.

Jessie Traver finds a brief mention in her husband's obituary, and paltry though it is, this is perhaps one of a few pieces of information available about her life before she became Mrs. Moore:

...he was married July 8, 1879, in Averill Park, N. Y., to Miss Jessie Fremont Traver, daughter of a lawyer of Troy, N. Y., and sailed for India, October 11, 1879, under appointment of the American Baptist Missionary Union, to Nowgong, Assam. Mrs Moore was on furlough in America at the time of his last illness...<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Moore, Mrs P.H. *Stray Leaves from Assam*. Rpt. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997. 115-6. Print.

<sup>296</sup> Moore. *Stray Leaves*. 117.

Jessie Traver Moore signed her name as Mrs. P. H. Moore in her journals written from Assam. Four volumes of her journals, *Twenty Years in Assam or Leaves from my Journal*, *Further Leaves from Assam*, *Autumn Leaves from Assam* and *Stray Leaves from Assam* cover the periods from October 1879 to March 1916. Apart from her journals, she also wrote books for children in Assamese, some of which were used as text-books in schools. In her journals, she mentions the printing and arrival of printed books from Calcutta such as *Acts Explained to Children*, *Peep of Day* in three parts, *Line upon Line*, also in three parts.

While Eliza Brown's letters clearly resonate with ideals and ethos identifiable with contemporary Victorian notions of femininity and mission, Mary Mead Clark's observations were more in the style of a confident, adventurous *woman* traveller of the late nineteenth century, and one can go so far as to compare it to the style made popular by travel writers like Mary Kingsley. This is understandable as Mary Clark was part of the second wave of missionaries who landed in Assam, decades after the departure of the earlier missionaries from Assam such as the Browns, the Bronsons, and the Cutters etc. Jessie Traver Moore, straddling the years between late nineteenth century and early twentieth century of missionary activity in Assam, was a contemporary of Mary Clark. Yet Jessie Moore's journals are a complete, and in so many ways, significant departure from the narratives of either Eliza Brown or Mary Clark. The difference is even more astonishing, because Mary Clark's *A Corner in India* came out at the same time as Jessie Moore was also bringing out volumes of her journals of life in Nowgong, Assam. In one of her entries she mentions, "We have just received a present from Dr. E. W. Clark of his wife's new book – 'A Corner of India'. It has pictures, and is fine."<sup>297</sup>

However, though there is no attempt here at an exhaustive comparative/contrastive study of the two writers and *how* or *what* they wrote, a cursory appreciation of some basic differences will be helpful in understanding the multivocality of missionary accounts.

The entire corpus of Jessie Moore's accounts can be labelled as a crossover narrative that, in fact, encompasses and accommodates the genres of journals, diaries, official reports, travel accounts or autobiographies. As such, hers is an important addition to the existing voices of first-hand commentaries about the American Baptists in the region of Assam, while at the

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<sup>297</sup> Moore, Mrs P. H. *Autumn Leaves from Assam*. Rpt. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997. 4. Print.

same time providing a parallel narrative about the intricate processes of writing mission histories. Apart from the various issues that confront us in such accounts/narratives, they also function as invaluable sources of information. It has been observed that, “journals, diaries, official reports, travel accounts...and autobiographies all feature as the source of ethnographic information and attitudes alongside the more formal ethnographic sources...”<sup>298</sup>

This chapter will present a reading of Jessie Moore’s second published journal, *Further Leaves from Assam* while attempting to underscore certain themes, stances and negotiations that a missionary wife such as Jessie Moore had to assume, in the narratives of mission histories.

But first, I feel that some short descriptions about her other three journals is necessary to give us an idea of Jessie Moore as a writer of journals conscientiously publishing them, and as a faithful keeper of records.

The first instalment, *Twenty Years in Assam or Leaves from my Journal* came out in 1901 and the first entry starts on October 1879, en route from New York to Assam. Jessie gives us a brief glimpse of herself in one of the initial entries. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1879, she writes thus:

...– My 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, and our [Pitt and her] first together. The old family Bible at home reads –“Jessie Fremont Traver, born November 11, 1857, at Sand Lake, Rens. Co., New York.” My days were spent at Sand Lake until it was time for me to go away to boarding school. First a year at the Lansingburgh Seminary, and then to Hamilton Female Seminary. It was while in Hamilton, N. Y. I first met Pitt H. Moore, my good husband...<sup>299</sup>

She also records on her husband’s birthday on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1879:

...this is Pitt’s birthday. He was born of missionary parents in Akyab, Arracan, Burma, on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1853. His father was Rev. Calvin C. Moore, who,

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<sup>298</sup> Hulme, Peter, and Russell McDougall. “Introduction: In the Margins of Anthropology.” *Writing, Travel and Empire: In the Margins of Anthropology*. Eds. Peter Hulme and Russell McDougall. London : I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007. 6. Print.

<sup>299</sup> Moore, Mrs P. H. *Twenty Years in Assam or Leaves from my Journal*. Rpt. New Delhi: Omsons, 1982. 5. Print.

after 7 years of earnest Missionary work in Burma, was obliged to return to America on account of failure of health. Pitt was taken home by sailing vessel ‘round the Cape,’ when so young that he learned to walk on shipboard.<sup>300</sup>

*Twenty years in Assam* covers the events in Jessie’s life from 1879- 1899. Roughly summed up, it records the birth of her daughter Clara in 1881, visit to America with Clara in 1889, “the great earthquake in Assam 1897,” another furlough home in 1898, and back to Assam in 1899 after leaving Clara to attend Northfield Seminary, Massachusetts.

*Further Leaves from Assam* is the second volume, covering events from 1900-1907 and first published in 1907. She writes in the Preface that the second volume was written on the “expressed” wishes of her missionary friends, due to the usefulness of *Twenty Years* in looking up dates and events. I have elaborated on the significance of her Preface further on in this chapter. *Further Leaves from Assam* was chosen as the text for this chapter from among the rest of Moore’s journals for a number of reasons. At the outset, it was felt that what she wrote in the Preface of this volume indicated her conscious effort to continue writing her lived experiences for the reading public, and thus this particular journal marks the beginning of Jessie’s career as a writer sharing aspects of her life with a public readership. This is also the most productive period of the author’s stay in Assam as she wrote several books for children around this time. The period this journal spans marks the completion of twenty-eight years in Assam, and the Moores’ silver wedding anniversary together. Jessie Moore tries to encompass events local and global throughout the entries, marking the death of Queen Victoria, President McKinley’s death in America, the Coronation of King Edward VII, and the subsequent Coronation durbar in Delhi, thereby giving her entries a chatty, conversational style. This particular trait alone makes *Further Leaves* the most readable volume in the series. At the personal front, this period too marks important defining moments in the lives of the people she loved. Her daughter Clara graduated from the Northfield Seminary in 1900 and entered Syracuse Medical College as a student. Clara visited her parents in Assam in 1903, her first and final visit since leaving Assam as a child in 1898. The subsequent years see Clara’s engagement to a fellow physician and then her marriage in 1906, all recorded with pride and happiness by her mother Jessie. Furthermore, I consider the years 1900-07 as a period in Jessie Moore’s life when she is fairly “settled” in her life in Nowgong, quietly

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<sup>300</sup> Moore. *Twenty Years*. 6.

scribbling away in her journals, and writing her books for children with a level of contentment. Familiar routines and duties mark every entry, and this is also the period when the school for girls is established and makes good progress. By this time, the Moores are considered to be “old” and experienced hands of the American Baptist Missionary Union in Assam.

The third volume came out in 1910 and was titled *Autumn Leaves from Assam*, written from 1908-1910. It is one of the shortest journals in the series, and mostly includes details about the furlough home in America from September 1908 to September 1909, apart from the usual records of births, deaths, baptisms and marriages. The events of significance in Jessie Moore’s life at this period are the completion of 30 years in Assam, the voyage to America and visit to Clara’s home, the birth of her grandson Robert Moore Harris, family reunions in America, and the death of her mother, aged 76. Incidentally, *Further Leaves from Assam* and *Autumn Leaves from Assam* are both “lovingly dedicated” to the memory of Jessie’s mother, Mrs. Clara M. Traver.

*Stray Leaves from Assam* came out in 1916 with a dedication to “The memory of my husband, Rev. Pitt Holland Moore, M. A.” This journal covers the years from 1911-1916 and Moore writes in the Preface that “it completes our 36 years and more of work in Assam.”<sup>301</sup> *Stray Leaves* is the fourth and last of the series of journals that Jessie Moore wrote and published. This volume records her fifty-fifth birthday in 1912 and her voyage to America in the same year to greet the birth of a second grandson. 1913 is also significant for the death of Rev. E. W. Clark in America, and Pitt Moore’s sixtieth birthday. A 1914 entry also marks the thirty-fifth wedding anniversary of the Moores, and her final trip to America. She also writes about her husband’s award of the “Kaisar-i-Hind” by the Government in 1915 for his services to India, and the entries conclude in March 1916 with news of Mr. Moore’s death in India on his way to America:

...yesterday we had sad news from India. A cablegram from India...saying my dear husband has gone to his Heavenly Home. I know it is all just as Pitt would have it. God knows best. Pitt is now free from limitations and happy with his

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<sup>301</sup> Moore. *Stray Leaves*.

Saviour. He loved India, and worked so faithfully for the salvation of the Assamese...

...Pitt died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, 1916, in the Calcutta Hospital. Burial in Nowgong tomorrow. I suppose Pitt was just starting to come home to me. I am thankful he died on land, and is buried in Nowgong, Assam, India...<sup>302</sup>

In the penultimate entry, which is on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1916, Jessie Moore regrets the loss of her husband in a typically restrained manner thus:

...I feel my loss, and loneliness more today, but I must not complain. I must remember Pitt is perfectly happy with his Saviour, and it is all just as he wants it...<sup>303</sup>

### **Anxiety of Authorship**

Gibert and Gubar identify a “coherence of theme and imagery” in the works of writers who were, in a sense, geographically, historically and psychologically separate from each other. This coherence began to appear like “a distinctively female literary tradition” “but which no one had yet defined in its entirety”.<sup>304</sup> Women, both in life and in art, were figuratively and literally confined, enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society. To quote:

...images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors — such patterns recurred throughout this tradition, along with obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia...<sup>305</sup>

It would not be fair to assert, or to even suggest, that Moore’s journals exhibit the symptoms of neurosis commonly identifiable with literary women of the nineteenth century. What is interesting however, are the things she selectively mentions in the journals. While her

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<sup>302</sup> Moore. *Stray Leaves*. 82-3.

<sup>303</sup> Moore. *Stray Leaves*. 83.

<sup>304</sup> Gilbert and Gubar. xi.

<sup>305</sup> Gilbert and Gubar.



journals are full of information, such as records of births, deaths, marriages, baptisms, missionary furloughs and such, they also contain numerous excerpts of her husband's correspondence, his sermons, his mission activities, etc. In all these wealth of detail, there is a significant absence throughout. The personality and presence of the writer is absent, often relegated to the background, fulfilling the duties of a missionary wife who chronicles her husband's activities with devotion. Throughout all these vignettes she presents, Jessie Moore also comes across as a loving and proud mother as she mentions her daughter Clara's progress in college, at medical school, her engagement, marriage, etc. She herself is a loving daughter too, with entries full of remembrances for her aged mother in America.

The tones of Jessie Moore's journals are a far cry from the anxious, impassioned notes that sometimes seep through Eliza Brown's missionary sense of purpose and optimism. For example, Brown writing in 1837 from Sadiya, Assam, to her sister Dorothy, confesses:

...oh sister, I dare not express all I feel. I sometimes have an unconquerable desire to see my friends once more before I die. But the Lord has been gracious to me; I should be very ungrateful to speak of trials and sufferings without at the same time acknowledging the goodness of the kind Hand that has so often given me support, and at times such sweet peace and consolation...<sup>306</sup>

Jessie's journals are very different in narrative style from Mary Mead Clark's travel memoir too, as there seems to be no conscious attempt to present her accounts as a manners-and-customs, first hand encounters with an exotic culture. Rather, Moore's accounts are the stuff of day to day life on a mission field, punctuated by excerpts taken from her husband's sermons, observations about the weather, problems with unreliable servants, trouble with boarding school girls etc. Sometimes the entries are in a chatty and newsy style, mentioning current news, letters from home, dinner menus and other miscellaneous stuff. Some of the entries are short while some provide statistical reports of mission affairs and conferences.

The questions that constantly confront a reader throughout the entries are, who is Jessie Moore? Is there a deliberate effort to auto-censor and limit the voice of the writer? Or are there instances when the writer makes her own voice heard? Did she function merely as a

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<sup>306</sup> Brown. 150.

mouthpiece for her husband's activities, as a mother missing her child, as a daughter worrying about her mother, or is there a hint of individuality similar to the one found Mary Clark's narrative? Finally, the theme of women's social upliftment is always balanced by an equally strong theme of domesticity and chaste Christian womanhood in such literature. How are such themes reconciled and presented by a woman writing in the early part of the twentieth century?

If Jessie Moore's stances in her journals reflect an acutely complex position, it also seems to be in sync with the objectives nurtured by the American women's auxiliary chapters to foreign missions which started cropping up after the event of the Civil War. Women's participation in the foreign missions enterprise, to quote Patricia Hill:

...offered them a role in a world-wide enterprise that claimed ultimate significance yet was entirely consistent with their ideology of home and motherhood and their theology of sacrificial service. In undertaking a mission to women and children in other cultures, evangelical women did not venture out of the domestic sphere; they simply enlarged it...<sup>307</sup>

On the subject of correspondence between missionaries and their supporters at home, Hill highlights the general consensus that:

...sermons and homilies could safely be left to men. A female audience's attention could be better held by descriptions of people and exotic customs. Once again, the underlying assumption is that women respond to personal and particular need, not to abstract discussion of the eschatological implications of world evangelization...<sup>308</sup>

Marie Louise Pratt identifies an often distinct attitude in travel writings that try to give a "manners-and-customs" portrait as a normalizing discourse, while in fact codifying difference. Taking the case of the eighteenth century traveller John Barrow's account, Pratt says that "manners-and-customs descriptions of indigenous peoples are appended to or

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<sup>307</sup> Hill. 60.

<sup>308</sup> Hill. 104.

embedded in the day-to-day narrative of the journey.” What is most interesting however is that:

...in contrast to what we might expect, that day-to-day narrative is most often largely devoted not to Indiana Jones-style confrontations with the natives but to the considerably less exciting presentation of landscape...<sup>309</sup>

Mrs Moore’s entry of 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1901 is a lengthy diatribe about certain drawbacks of the hot weather in Assam, the birds, mosquitoes, insects, ants and other creatures, features that make life difficult at the station. There is a suggestion that life in an exotic location is a rather banal, exasperating existence without any hint of romance or adventure. The entry ends, however, with the quintessential missionary spirit of optimism:

...the hot weather is beginning, and with it two most trying birds begin their songs (?). one is called the “Brain-fever bird” because its harsh and oft-repeated sound is trying to the brain. The other objectionable bird is always repeating...(where is my brother), or as the Tea Planters interpret it, “Make more Pekoe.” The “kau, kau, kau” of the bold crows and ravens of this country is trying. The many insects, too, begin to come with the heat. Ants of all sorts, mosquitoes, spiders, beetles, and many little insects that come about the lamp in the evening. The little house lizards find plenty to eat now. The “Assam Geranium,” as we call it, is a particularly disagreeable little insect. As the ground gets damp the white ants are more industrious in their work above ground. Still with all the drawbacks we love Assam, and shall be sorry to leave even for a short time...<sup>310</sup>

The troubles with seasonal insects are not the only irritants, as there are the seasonal diseases that the rainy seasons bring. The missionaries are subjected to frequent earthquakes too. So the “Indiana Jones-style confrontations with natives” are noticeably absent in Moore’s narratives, as the missionaries are too occupied with trying to survive the climatic onslaughts of nature. In fact, during these difficult times the natives are visible only as suffering victims, hardly a threat for the missionaries. In Moore’s 14<sup>th</sup> June 1900 entry, she writes:

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<sup>309</sup> Pratt. *Scratches on the Face*. 141.

<sup>310</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 44-5.

...Such hot weather here this week. One day mercury went up to 98° in the shade in our front verandah. The nights this week are too hot to sleep well. Refreshing rain came last night and now it is cooler. We ought to get a good deal of rain soon if we are to have 100 inches, like last year. There is considerable dysentery among the natives now. Bowel trouble and fever are very common here...<sup>311</sup>

In the subsequent entry of 16<sup>th</sup> June:

...An earthquake shock this afternoon which made us run out of doors. The rumbling sound before the shake was very noticeable...<sup>312</sup>

And yet another earthquake in the same year:

...A rather sharp earthquake shock one night last week awakened most of the Nowgongites. Many jumped out of bed and were ready to run out of doors...I feel pretty safe in our big bungalow, because it stood the big shake of June, 1897, remarkably well...<sup>313</sup>

Talking about the socially-accepted proprieties observed by nineteenth century women travel writers, Susan Pickford notes that “women were not meant to make authoritative pronouncements in the public arena, whether through literary or political activity.” She however adds that women did write and publish travel letters which:

...remained within the bounds of propriety as long as the fiction of a private audience was maintained — hence the oft-repeated prefatory disclaimers that letters were not intended for publication. In these letters, they gave their travel *impressions*, which by definition made no claims to authority. Likewise, women frequently downplayed their achievements as writers, casting their texts as

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<sup>311</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 10.

<sup>312</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*.

<sup>313</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 15-16.

devoid of true literary merit rather than proclaiming the originality and validity of their authorial voice...<sup>314</sup>

Mission policies went so far as to dictate a set of acceptable behaviours for wives to adopt, as befitting their auxiliary position. They were not expected to emerge to the foreground, rather they were encouraged to be silent helpmeets to their husbands. *The Indian Missionary Manual* of 1864 by John Murdoch has an exhaustive list providing advice to young missionaries on diverse subjects such as “Health,” “Personal Religion and Habits”, “Household Arrangements,” “Efforts for Females” etc. In the section “Effort for Females,” the author counsels the young missionary on the importance of marrying the right kind of woman who would be an asset to him, since “the pious man who marries a worldly woman places himself in a condition of great danger.” He reminds his readers that “the Missionary’s wife should be of the right spirit.”<sup>315</sup> A wife with the right sort of spirit, he implies, fulfils a dual purpose in the mission field:

...the spirit of the Missionary’s wife is important, not only on account of its bearing upon himself; but from its effect upon measures for benefitting the women of India...although a few unmarried female labourers have worked nobly, the compiler thinks that the great reliance must be upon the wives of Missionaries, at least for a long time to come...<sup>316</sup>

“The right spirit” though vague in its very description, was indeed a much sought-after attribute in missionary wives. Grimshaw and Sherlock details the high demands on the code of conduct for wives in the mission fields:

...no matter their skills or load, if wives were to gain official approval, however, they needed to maintain a modest, self-deprecatory demeanour that translated into virtual invisibility in mission reports and that might one day be praised in the obituary columns. By proving they could survive both physically and

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<sup>314</sup> Pickford, Susan. “The Page as Private/Public Space in Mariam Starke’s Travel Writings on Italy.” *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*. Eds. Julia Keuhn and Paul Smethurst. New York: Routledge, 2009. 65. Print.

<sup>315</sup> Murdoch, John. *The Indian Missionary Manual: or, Hints to Young Missionaries in India. With Lists of Books*. Madras, 1864. 379. Web.

<sup>316</sup> Murdoch. 380-1.

culturally on colonial frontiers, missionary wives helped pave the way for the employment of women as missionaries in their own right...<sup>317</sup>

Following is the Preface of Jessie Moore's *Further Leaves from Assam*, where she makes no pretensions about the literary value of her book. Instead, she claims in a self-effacing way that the book would be useful for certain objectives:

...Some of my missionary friends in Assam have expressed a wish that I continue my journal. They find my "Twenty Years in Assam" useful in looking up dates, and getting a continuous outline of the work. The book has also helped friends at home to get some idea of our life and work in India. May God use this second little book to His praise, is my prayer...<sup>318</sup>

Such a reticent attitude in airing their opinions freely, may perhaps account for what Barbara Korte passes off as the 'otherness' of women's travel writing, a relative otherness that requires subtle differentiation. This is manifest in the "special propensity in travel writing by women to associate journeys with an escape from 'normal' life and to express a counter-discourse to this life."<sup>319</sup>

Jessie Moore as an individualised, audible voice emerges only occasionally, very often overshadowed by the presence of Mrs. Moore throughout most of the narratives. It is suggested that:

...the literary woman has always faced equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female "limitations" and concentrate on the "lesser" subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior powers...<sup>320</sup>

In a similarly telling manner, Jessie Moore seems to be masking her own personality in the anonymity of "Mrs. P. H. Moore" the missionary wife. If one were to look for examples of

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<sup>317</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 183.

<sup>318</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*.

<sup>319</sup> Korte. 126.

<sup>320</sup> Gilbert and Gubar. 64.

self-inflicted enclosures in literary spaces, the journals of Jessie Moore provide ample examples of such manifestations.

Gillian Rose puts the othering of knowledge-information in an interesting way, while talking in the context of feminist geographies. Masculinist work, she says, claims to be exhaustive and therefore assumes that no-one else can add to its knowledge. This attitude results in a state where it is reluctant to listen to anyone else, further excluding and alienating women as sources/producers of knowledge.<sup>321</sup>

In *Further Leaves from Assam*, Jessie Moore proceeds to describe Nowgong in a few lines:

...Nowgong means *new town*. It is the Government headquarters of a district of the same name, and has a population of 4,500...the whole district has an area of 3,840 square miles, and a population of 261,160 souls, living in 1,118 villages...<sup>322</sup>

In the subsequent paragraph following the above quoted, she refers to Mr. Haggard (another American Baptist missionary in Assam), who “has given the following interesting facts about Assam.” Then she duly reproduces a Haggard’s account listing “Position and Products,” “People,” and “Religion” of Assam.<sup>323</sup> It seems strange that she had to cite from a *more* authoritative male source for these specific information, though she herself had been in Assam for decades and would have been perfectly competent to comment on such matters.

In a similar instance, Jessie wishes to inform her readers about the events of the “Biennial Assam Missionary Conference” held in “Gauhati” (Guwahati) in 1903. She writes, “...I will copy the Report of Conference Pitt has prepared for the Boston *Watchman*.”<sup>324</sup> Wishing to keep her readers in America about the proceedings of the Assam Baptist missionaries’ annual conference in 1905, Jessie yet again bows out of the narrative as she writes, “I cannot do

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<sup>321</sup> Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity, 1993. 4. Print.

<sup>322</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 38-9.

<sup>323</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 39-40.

<sup>324</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 71.

better for my readers than to insert Mr. Paul's little report of Conference, which was printed in the *Standard* of Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1905."<sup>325</sup>

On one occasion Jessie mentions the Assam Census of 1901 and quotes from the official report. Here in this instance, the official report is important as it lends credibility to the success story of the mission endeavour in Assam. She writes:

...The report of the Assam Census, taken in 1901, is just out, and we find our copy very interesting. I quote from page 45: "Amongst the native population Christianity has made great strides during the past ten years, their numbers having risen from 14,762 to 33,595." Again: "The Baptist Mission has also met with a large measure of success, the numbers of this sect having risen from 3,767 to 10,045..."<sup>326</sup>

She also makes a note of the political changes taking place in the province in 1905, the re-negotiation of geographical boundaries and the re-naming of the region. This is done solely, however, for the benefit of providing information to her readers and not for the purpose of airing her political views on the matter:

...Many changes are taking place in Assam since the 15<sup>th</sup> Oct. The province is enlarged from six-and-a-quarter million to 30,000,000. The name is now "Eastern Bengal and Assam." The Chief Commissioner of Assam is now Lieut.-Governor, and his wife is Lady Fuller. The Government rules and regulations and salaries, etc., will now be the same as in Bengal...<sup>327</sup>

Despite her reluctance to put forward her own views and write in her own voice on certain subjects, Jessie does make the occasional criticism of mission policy. The criticism is far from scathing, but even this is surprising as it is completely out of character for a missionary wife who followed certain professional codes, and who was not expected to have strong views on mission administration. One such incident is given below:

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<sup>325</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 116.

<sup>326</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 65-6.

<sup>327</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 132-3.



...We are sorry to lose Mr. Haggard from the work in Assam. He was recalled from London by a cablegram from the Rooms, Boston... So many churches and associational meetings to address, and Mission literature to prepare and distribute, etc. We wish the home churches did not require so much coaxing to make them do their duty in sending the gospel to foreign lands. Dr. Barbour says they will try to send another new man to Assam soon...<sup>328</sup>

It is understood, of course, that the operational word is the “we” here, and the authorial voice is once again borrowing legitimacy with the use of the collective “we,” and opting to stay in the shadows.

Missionary accounts or colonial narratives are never complete without a description of the exotic and picturesque, and Moore’s account is no exception. In one entry she describes a first-hand experience of a Hindu wedding. The description is rudimentary and essentialising, with the usual elephants, palanquins, and noisy songs. The remarkable thing about Jessie’s description is that the incident is presented as a voyeuristic episode, as she follows the party and observes the festivities, but she is not part of the festivities. The only personal aside she lends to this occasion is about the amount of noise the revellers create:

...I followed a Hindu wedding procession this morning. The bridegroom rode on an elephant. The bride was carried in a small covered palanquin. I saw her carried into the yard of her new home, but she kept her head covered with her cloth. As they entered the yard the women sang about the bride and her mother-in-law...the company sang their native songs, and the boys used their musical instruments, fifes, clashing cymbals, drums, etc. They are very noisy over a Hindu wedding. After a night of merry-making the bridegroom takes his bride, accompanied by a procession of friends, to his home. We always know when such a procession is passing our bungalow because of the noise...<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 15.

<sup>329</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 37.

As far as Hinduism is concerned, she is unambiguous. Jessie Moore echoes the opinion popularly held by most Europeans, colonial agents as well as missionaries as she states, “There is much that is disgusting about Hinduism including the many beggars.”<sup>330</sup>

It is apparent that mission protocol does not prevent Jessie from voicing out strong opinions about the natives. She makes no bones about the native way of life, and how they are different from the “civilized” lot. However, there are exceptions to be found among the rabble and perhaps this is because the “better” natives happen to be Christian converts. Mrs Moore’s opinion on native sorrow or native hygiene are easy to infer from the illustrations below:

...To-day occurred the funeral of little Sonnie, Bogi’s grandchild. The little boy was three years old, and has suffered for three months from Black Fever...Seldom does a native child get such tender care as Sonnie had, and his parents are heartbroken. *I was never before at a native funeral where the sorrow seemed so like that of white folks...*<sup>331</sup> [emphasis mine].

About native hygiene:

...We were greatly surprised last evening to hear of the sudden death of Naina. She was an Assamese Christian sister whom I have loved for over 20 years. *She was unusually neat for a native*, and I always enjoyed a call and chat at her home...<sup>332</sup> [emphasis mine].

In the context of Marianna Starke the travel writer, Susan Pickford underscores the perceived notions of letter-writing as a private activity, and “not always considered appropriate when women’s social skills were required elsewhere...”<sup>333</sup> Pickford provides a generally accepted profile of the nineteenth century woman traveller:

...Women who travelled traditionally did so to accompany other members of their family or in a subordinate role as a governess or nurse. They had very little

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<sup>330</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 76.

<sup>331</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 13-14.

<sup>332</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 99.

<sup>333</sup> Pickford. 64.

leeway to explore a foreign country on their own terms and at their own pace, and thus to write authoritative accounts of their travels for the public arena. It was generally acknowledged, however, that they did excel in writing letters to their mothers and sisters at home...<sup>334</sup>

In the genre of travel writing, there are two discernible “poles of discourse”, suggests Pickford. One is the masculine virtues of objective rationality and narrative discipline as opposed to the other feminine characteristics of intuitive subjectivity. The second discourse, she says, in general lead to rambling, ill-constructed discourse. She notes, also, that Mariana Starke tried to “reconcile objectivity and femininity by writing factual accounts in letter format...”<sup>335</sup>

If “rambling, ill-constructed discourse” is an indicator of intuitive subjectivity usually found in writings by women, there are plenty of instances where Moore displays this lack of narrative discipline. In a typical entry dated the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1902, for example:

...Pitt spent two weeks on the Raha side of our district, and visited six weekly markets to teach and sell religious books.

We are glad to have Miss Miller here. She arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

It seems best for me to go to Calcutta to consult an oculist...<sup>336</sup>

Random subjects yoked together in one common entry, without any apparent unifying theme, are a common feature in Jessie Moore’s journal, and one comes across them frequently. Sometimes subjects of personal interest only for the writer are mentioned along with mission activities. Here is another sample:

...Bro. Orson Moore [Pitt’s brother] is visiting Paris and London, and studying music and seeing the sights. He will return to New York in the autumn.

We have just heard Clara [their daughter in New York] is homesick, and wants to come to visit us. We hope to have her here in our home before Christmas.

The iron frame for the new dormitory for our girls has come.

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<sup>334</sup> Pickford.

<sup>335</sup> Pickford. 65-8.

<sup>336</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 69.

Mr. Carvell has sent the manuscript for the “Mikir First Reader” to Shillong, where it will be printed at Government expense. It is in the English character instead of the Bengali character...<sup>337</sup>

In view of these manifestations alluded to above, we come back to Gilbert and Gubar’s take on Harold Bloom’s Freudian theories of patrilineal literary inheritance:

...for an “anxiety of influence” the woman writer substitutes what we have called an “anxiety of authorship,” an anxiety built from complex and often only barely conscious fears of that authority which seems to the female artist to be by definition inappropriate to her sex. Because it is based on the woman’s socially determined sense of her own biology, this anxiety of authorship is quite distinct from the anxiety about creativity that could be traced in such male writers as Hawthorne or Dostoevsky. Indeed, to the extent that it forms one of the unique bonds that link women in what we might call the secret sisterhood of their literary subculture, such anxiety in itself constitutes a crucial mark of that subculture...<sup>338</sup>

### **Narrating the Domestic Space**

Letters formed an important discourse in the mission enterprise, narrowing the physical distance between missionaries in the fields and parishioners at home. This is where women’s “skills” proved invaluable. Their letters home “helped make missions ‘real.’”<sup>339</sup> Rhonda Ann Semple points out that throughout the nineteenth century, a formal business style dominated the letters written by men. In her words, it was “a familiar theme in nineteenth century autobiography”:

...wherein men masked professional insecurity by constructing a triumphant narrative at the expense of any private disclosure...the letters written by male missionaries were written in a completely different tone from women’s letters; private matters were rarely discussed except when they related to professional

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<sup>337</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 86.

<sup>338</sup> Gilbert and Gubar. 51.

<sup>339</sup> Semple. 195.

life...however it was information about everyday activities provided in familiar language that was needed to make mission work 'real' to supporters, and this what most men were simply unable to provide...<sup>340</sup>

Mission fields persevered in functioning as a miniature a well-oiled economic machine, where the agents were small but significant cogs in the larger machinery of the empire. The work methodology of a missionary wife was easily distinguishable from that of a male missionary. Grimshaw and Shylock suggests that male missionary's main focus in the field comprised of "conversion through teaching, preaching and negotiation." These masculine activities were seen as "work more easily recognized in a capitalist society," and therefore as "deserving financial remuneration." On the other hand, the work of a missionary wife was "within a household economy of pre-industrial times...designated as auxiliary to that of men," which was, nevertheless essential to the sustenance of an ideal, the ideal of "European domestic family life." The auxiliary roles of missionary wives and the gendered nature of workloads in the field were also essential for the creation of a "Christian community," and to the "wider cause of proselytization."<sup>341</sup> The manifold duties of a missionary wife included:

...sexuality, childbearing, and child-rearing; housewifery, ranging across obtaining food, cooking, cleaning, sewing, nursing the sick, maintaining a vegetable garden, keeping poultry...furthering the mission work which brought in their husbands' stipends. Mission societies also expected wives to take on the additional tasks of teaching local women and children the skills of European domesticity...and to teach reading, infused, of course, by spiritual truth...<sup>342</sup>

For the missionary wives, there were other unavoidable factors that prevented a more central role in the field, namely the tropical climates that "limited the time that women could spend on outside duties." Also, they had to set themselves up as admirable examples of Christian wives and mothers, which attitude was greatly supported and encouraged by the mission societies. Nevertheless, whatever the contributions made by the missionary wives, in large or small measures, has been "consistently ignored."<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Semple. 217.

<sup>341</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 180.

<sup>342</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock.

<sup>343</sup> Semple. 198.

When the wives of missionaries accompanied their husbands to the field, they “simply transferred familial obligations onto the mission.” In short, their duties were etched out for them, and there would be no radical change in the domestic set-up. Rather, one could expect to be saddled with more professional demands along with the everyday domestic duties:

...their presence in the mission endeavour was dependent on their having formed a partnership with a man, and the expectation of the mission was that their role was first of all domestic. Whatever time was left over could be filled by visiting local women and teaching children. This women’s work was never well represented in official publications, but women’s skills in using informal networks of communication enabled them to attract financial support for their work...<sup>344</sup>

The everyday domestic affairs documented by countless numbers of women writing from their mission stations are hardly trivial, for they are a discourse in themselves and they tell a story even in the silences. For feminists too, following the ethos that the private is the political, the humdrum of everyday accounts cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in the narrative of power structures. Gillian Rose explains how the everyday, or the domestic space, becomes a stage of contestations in gender relations:

...the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women. The limits on women’s everyday activities are structured by what society expects women to be and therefore to do. The everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created and contested...<sup>345</sup>

Taking this argument a notch further, Rose stresses that there is a conscious effort to recover the everyday and the ordinary, because the “mundane world of routine is the realm of women’s social life in masculinist society.” According to her, examining the lives of women

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<sup>344</sup> Semple. 199.

<sup>345</sup> Rose. 17.

necessitates an “attention to the ordinary, to the unexceptional, because women are excluded from arenas of power and prestige.”<sup>346</sup>

According to Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, scholarly interest in the domestic arena of missionary work can be explained by two developments in the humanities. The first development was the rise of a new kind of feminism in the 1970s, and the second was “a shift within anthropological scholarship away from examining non-European cultures to the study of cultural exchanges.” Feminist scholars suggested that mainstream history focused on meta-narratives where the actors were almost always male. They contended that women too were closely connected to these narratives, but were ignored. Also, gender constituted an analytical category parallel with class and race which would substantially inform any history. Mission history remained insulated from this new wave of feminist theory well into the 1980s, says Grimshaw and Sherlock, until “anthropologists and a new breed of social historians began to write about missions as a prime site wherein the records of daily behaviour could be studied.” Women’s daily rounds, their roles as support for male missionaries, the role of the single woman, assumed new implications in forming European ideas of femininity. There came to be established by this new scholarship, a narrative of women in the mission field to set beside the male accounts. Thus, this perspective saw missions as an important space for observing cultural conflict in which gender relations and the household were crucial battlegrounds.<sup>347</sup>

There was a noticeable change in the demography of missions by late nineteenth century, “white women outnumbered the men in imperial missions as wives, teachers, nurses, and nuns, not only from Britain and British ex-colonies such as Canada and Australia, but also from the United States and Continental Europe.”<sup>348</sup> Married women were not officially commissioned as missionaries, but they were expected to share the load. One reason for their obscurity is given as:

...they are under-represented in archives, because, unlike their husbands, they had no obligation to submit reports and journals. Single women, on the other hand, sustained the same commitments as the men. Mission journals printed

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<sup>346</sup> Rose. 22.

<sup>347</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 175-7.

<sup>348</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 174.

news about them and mission wives as a means of interesting the Christian public, especially fundraisers, in the broader work...<sup>349</sup>

Another reason is:

...because women's letters went mainly to relatives rather than to society headquarters, they are under-represented in mission archives, a problem compounded by a lack of conceptual frameworks for representing the wives' existence. Women's daily work was relegated to the margins and divorced from the broader narrative of the establishment missions, which centred on conversion and the nurturing of new churches...<sup>350</sup>

Jessie tries to give her readers glimpses of everyday life on a mission compound, usually in a chatty and conversational tone. For instance:

...Pitt has gone to Udmari for a few days. The Chief Commissioner of Assam is expected here next week. The station has been beautifully cleaned up in honour of his coming. The natives are decorating the place by setting out plantain trees, with arches between them, along the river bank...<sup>351</sup>

There is an effort to engage her readers with every aspect of life in Nowgong. This is partly done as a professional duty, and partly as a continuation of private conversations with loved relatives and friends back home. Nothing is too trivial, or too unimportant to be noted down and shared:

...Our new Deputy Commissioner, Capt. Playfair, expects to be married in the Autumn. Dr. Bancroft may bring his mother here to live. At present there are no ladies in Nowgong except the missionaries...<sup>352</sup>

And:

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<sup>349</sup> Grimshaw and Sherloc. 174-5.

<sup>350</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 175.

<sup>351</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 14-15.

<sup>352</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 83.



...We do enjoy the good fresh fruit we can always get here. We have had some fairly good mangoes, and now we get delicious pineapples, bananas, and limes. I get lovely flowers from Mrs. McNaught's garden.

Humitra and the girls have had a little scare from some boys who took to night parading. As soon as Humitra got sight of the boys, so I could know who they were, I threatened them with the police.

Another Tea Planter, Mr. Allman, died of fever in this district, and was buried here on Tuesday...<sup>353</sup>

The station in Nowgong has a social life too, and Jessie provides vignettes where the European and the American communities in the area get together to celebrate certain special days. Life in a mission compound is not only about converting natives, preaching in the bazaars, fighting diseases or travelling in the dense jungles of Assam. Missionaries also, can join in the festivities and leave aside other pressing concerns if called upon to do so:

...Yesterday was an eventful day in Nowgong. At 9-30 A.M. the Lieutenant-Governor and Lady Fuller arrived. At 11-30 A.M. Sir Bampfylde Fuller opened the new public library. Then a big lunch at the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow...<sup>354</sup>

She describes the events of the day are described in great detail:

...At 3 P.M. all repaired to Dr. McNaught's bungalow to witness the wedding of William R.R. Alexander and Miss Agnes McNaught. Rev. S. Endle came from Tezpur to perform the ceremony, and several Tea Planters and their wives were in from the district. The bride looked pale, but very pretty in her white satin gown and veil. After the ceremony and congratulations, refreshments were served. Then Agnes changed her satin for a pink-and-white muslin dress, and the happy couple started off amid a shower of rice. They drove ten miles to their tea-garden home at Sukinbari...<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 184.

<sup>354</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 143.

<sup>355</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*.

The Coronation Durbar of King Edward VII finds mention too, and Jessie describes the event faithfully for the benefit of her readers. She follows the sequence of events with great interest, reproducing for her readers at home the initial disappointment of a postponement, and finally the pomp and ceremony of the occasion. On the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1903 she writes:

...Thursday. This was to have been a great day in England. All preparations were made for the coronation of King Edward VII. Last evening telegrams came saying: "Owing to the illness of the king the coronation is postponed indefinitely." This must bring great disappointments to many...<sup>356</sup>

And then in her next entry which is on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, she adds, "Later telegrams say the king had an operation and is recovering".<sup>357</sup> Finally, the great event does take place and it finds an extensive mention in her journal:

...We have just been reading of the great Coronation Durbar held in Delhi, India, on Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1903, and days following, when King Edward VII was proclaimed Emperor of India. The procession of 12,000 must have been imposing. There were 160 elephants, with native chiefs in gorgeous attire. The Viceroy, Lord Curzon, is a good speaker, and could be heard by all as he made his Durbar speech. The King, Edward VII, was represented by his brother, the Duke of Connaught. The first ladies in rank were the Duchess of Connaught and Lady Curzon. The massed band played. There was a large camp for the troops and others...<sup>358</sup>

Talking about Lady Dufferin's letters from India, Éadaoin Agnew shows how Lady Dufferin "reinforces her husband's political decisions and echoes his thoughts," concluding that "the texts of incorporated wives frequently contain descriptions of their husbands' activities..."<sup>359</sup>

Apart from making missions "real" to supporters at home, missionary wives also wrote about their husbands' commitments to the cause by describing their works and perseverance in the

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<sup>356</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 67.

<sup>357</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*.

<sup>358</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 77.

<sup>359</sup> Agnew, Éadaoin. "Relocating Domesticity: Letters from India by Lady Harriot Dufferin." *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*. eds. Julia Keuhn and Paul Smethurst. 102.

field. In this way, they were bringing the missions closer to the people at home, and painting an appealing picture of the missionary hero who was larger-than-life, yet an ordinary mortal:

...Pitt has gone to Balijuri to spend Sunday with the little church there. There are to be two native weddings and ten or more baptisms. Expect Pitt will be gone about five days.

Dear Pitt! In thinking of him, these words I read about James Russell Lowell come to my mind: "His conversation and daily walk in life are swayed by the extreme tenderness for the feelings of others. He would not give pain if he could help it. He would go so much more than half way in trying to help the person who was next to him, that he would permit himself to be bored, really without knowing that he was bored."

It is his love for Christ that makes him so anxious to help others. We have just been reading Sheldon's book, "What would Jesus do?" May the Holy Spirit teach us, is our prayer...<sup>360</sup>

And:

...Pitt has been at home for one week. Now he is off to Messa. He wants to visit the little churches at Udmari, Balijuri, and Kothiatoli this month. I came across this sentence in reading, and it made me think of Pitt: "He always makes his people think that his time is theirs, as long as he can be of service to them."

Pitt never appears impatient and as if in a hurry to be off, even though crowded with work...<sup>361</sup>

"Camp work" was an important undertaking for missionaries in the field, where they would spend weeks touring the interior areas from village to village annually. Such travelling was possible only during the dry winter seasons, as the roads could not be navigated during the difficult monsoon season. When a missionary went off visiting villages during camp season, marriage and baptism ceremonies would be performed. Jessie provides records of the number of baptisms and marriages performed during each tour in her journals. During the camp

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<sup>360</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 7-8.

<sup>361</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 35.

season in January 1901 she informs the readers about the death of Queen Victoria, and her husband's progress in camp:

...A telegram was received this morning which was sent from Calcutta to Nowgong. It read thus: "Her Majesty the Queen is dead." We suppose Queen Victoria died last evening, and it was soon cabled to Calcutta. What a loss to England! In how many countries her death will be mourned!

Pitt writes he is greatly enjoying his camp work of telling out the Good News of Salvation through Jesus. There were 22 baptisms on our field last year, and now there are several waiting for baptisms in places Pitt will soon visit...<sup>362</sup>

Jessie Moore presents her husband as the quintessential man of God, labouring for the people selflessly with admirable patience. At the same time, Pitt Moore is a loving husband and father, and Jessie on several occasions reproduces Pitt's letters written to their daughter in America. When Jessie shares Pitt's letters to Clara with the readers, it reveals another perspective of the missionary's personality to the readers. Here the readers can sympathise with the sentiments of a father who writes on a personal level to his daughter from far off lands, at the same time the formidable image of the missionary as an upright man of God is replaced with the figure of a father who engages with his child, sometimes in a note of light-hearted banter as he tells her amusing tales. For instance, Pitt and his brother Penn Moore hunted and skinned a tiger in the jungle during one of their tours. Jessie writes, "I copy a long letter Pitt has written to Clara. It is intended for Clara's twentieth birthday..." This is an excerpt of the letter:

...one day in December your papa and Uncle Penn were out in camp together at Kampur...a tiger had killed a cow right in the village the very night that we arrived there...Tigers usually carry off the cattle they kill to eat them quietly in some secluded place. But this one was so daring that he had not even taken the trouble to carry the cow away...the villagers were telling us how they heard him smack his lips as he feasted in the night...a bullet from one of the guns ended his fight...it was left with your mother what should be done with the skin. She decided that it should be sold, and the proceeds sent to Clara, for a birthday

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<sup>362</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 33.

present for her twentieth birthday, to help her on with her education. So that is the end of the tiger story...<sup>363</sup>

Pitt Moore is not only a loving father but also a devoted spouse, and Jessie acquaints her readers with her husband's gestures of tenderness time and again. They are a model Christian couple who enjoy domestic harmony, and despite his demanding religious duties the missionary does not neglect his wife. This makes him seem more human and not so emotionally detached as to neglect personal relationships and spousal duties. She shares an example of his thoughtfulness on the day of their marriage anniversary:

...The first thing that caught my attention this morning was a slip of paper on the table on which Pitt had written: "1879 – 1902. A little token of very much love from Pitt to Jessie"; and on the paper there reposed a bright gold sovereign...<sup>364</sup>

Simple questions the very notions of gendered constructions in nineteenth century masculine-feminine roles by pointing out that:

...while it is nineteenth-century women whose lives have been described as having been subjected to strict rules governing 'the domestic' and 'the private', this concept is more usefully applied to male mission workers...in fact, it would appear that it was the wives who actually possessed the skills necessary to pass between public and private more easily than did their husbands...<sup>365</sup>

Thus a reading of her journals shows how Jessie Moore appears to effortlessly and successfully bridge the gap between the public and the private, the professional and the personal. However, there are moments of self-censoring and moments where she assumes no responsibility for the information she desires to share. There are many instances where Jessie's accounts could very well be found similar, in so many respects, to the style of Fanny Parkes' nineteenth century journal *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*. What is most disturbing, however, is that the authorial persona, the woman Jessie Moore

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<sup>363</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 16-20.

<sup>364</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 67.

<sup>365</sup> Semple. 227.

remains obscured behind all the newsy details or the officialesque information that make up the bulk of her narrative. Though Jessie Moore travelled half the world to be a help-meet to her husband, the ethos of domesticity and femininity in conformity with her cultural conditionings were very well maintained. She diligently kept herself in the background of mission activities, focusing her energies on running the homestead, reaching out to women and children, maintaining correspondence with the home board, writing books for children and other womanly duties.

### **Gendered Missions**

Nan Johnson highlights a significant period for women in America, the postbellum period, which saw the emergence of “high-profile rhetorical careers of a handful of women”. She says that in spite of these women, or because of them, “postbellum America wondered uneasily just how public women’s lives were becoming and with what results.”<sup>366</sup> She further adds:

...in this historical moment of uneasiness, the icon of the quiet woman, the wine of life, seemed to erase the complexity of the woman question and return the American woman to the home where she belonged...overtly discouraging women from having strong voices, literally and culturally, and by reminding American readers that if happiness was to be secured, women should keep to their former place in the home and do it quietly...<sup>367</sup>

Patricia Hill gives a summary description of the inception of women into the American foreign missions endeavour, the enthusiastic participation of women in the effort, and the subsequent professionalization of women’s foreign missions. Ironically, women’s whole scale participation in overseas mission only served to widen the gap between male and female contributions, thereby creating a whole new trajectory of gendered duties in the field. At the end of the day, despite the rapid professionalization of women’s participation, the “rhetoric of domesticity”<sup>368</sup> came to be the only rhetoric to be retained.

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<sup>366</sup> Johnson, Nan. *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. 49. Print.

<sup>367</sup> Johnson. *Gender and Rhetorical Space*.

<sup>368</sup> Hill. 4.

She goes on to add that, in late nineteenth century America, foreign missions “gripped the imaginations and enlisted the support of hundreds of thousands of middle-class church women.” The years following the Civil War had given rise to a specific cultural and ideological climate which made foreign missions a “congenial subject for female benevolence.” As the participation of women in foreign missions mushroomed, there was a perceptible change in the philosophy of woman’s work whereby it became increasingly professionalized at the administrative level. Hill stresses that “the rhetoric of the movement reveals ideological changes that, when translated into practice, contributed to the redefinition of ideal womanhood and the emergence of the New Woman of the 1890s.” Patricia Hill also gives instances as to how, during this period, there was a specific trend in literature by women dealing with the theme of “romance of missions,” serving to illustrate the history of the movement while providing evidence of the hold that foreign missions had on the female imagination. The initial years of foreign missions presumed to formulate a “special and limited mission to women and children.” This, Hill adds, was “consonant with the Victorian sanctification of motherhood” and reflected the organizers’ assumptions about the “nature of woman and her proper role in society...”<sup>369</sup>

On the subject of women’s work by women, Hill identifies the mid-nineteenth century in America as a period when American evangelicals adopted a new theology of missions, laying special significance on the conversion of “heathen” mothers as the “most efficient means of Christianizing heathen lands.” To quote:

...since it was widely accepted that only women could reach the secluded females of the Orient, this emphasis on the conversion of mothers elevated the importance of woman’s mission and made American women peculiarly responsible for the success of the Protestant mission crusade. Victorian ideology buttressed this definition of woman’s duty by suggesting that her nature made her peculiarly fitted for the task...<sup>370</sup>

Therefore, there was a growing assumption in mission theories that women had a “special responsibility” in the “regeneration of non-Christian cultures” where the lives of women would be transformed. However, Hill states clearly that this new theory “offered no rationale

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<sup>369</sup> Hill. 3.

<sup>370</sup> Hill. 5.

for a distinctive mission of women, to women.” Meanwhile, “the rhetoric of a special mission was abandoned, the rhetoric of domesticity was retained...”<sup>371</sup>

While female missionaries had, relatively speaking, an official status and a greater autonomy at par with their male contemporaries, the role of the missionary wives were problematic at best. It is interesting to note that:

...in several denominations the wives of missionaries were no longer counted as missionaries unless they also functioned as teachers, doctors, nurses, evangelists, or social workers. The woman’s role in the missionary enterprise was no longer passive in any sense. Indeed, more broadly speaking, passivity was no longer a characteristic of the ideal woman...<sup>372</sup>

Jessie had no specific domain or “area of expertise” in the mission station, but her situation was even more complex and difficult to define, because of the very nature of the duties she had to perform. It was, to say the least, multi-tasking at best. The task of writing letters and responding to official and private correspondence must have been time-consuming, and wives must have had a major role to play in this area. The missionaries in the field were expected to maintain regular correspondence with each other via the “jungle telegraph” or by other orthodox means, sharing news of sickness, births, deaths, marriages, furloughs and such. There is a whole lot of information in Jessie Moore’s journals about fellow missionaries in the different stations, their stories of success, or often of tragedy and loss. Jessie Moore also wrote several books for children which were used as text-books in the schools and she mentions them to her readers. “My new little Assamese books, ‘Acts Explained to Children,’ were received from the press this week,”<sup>373</sup> she writes. Also:

...I have to-day sent to the English Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, the “copy” for another little Assamese book. It is Part II of “Peep of Day,” and intended for older children than the first book. This will complete my little series of three

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<sup>371</sup> Hill.

<sup>372</sup> Hill. 14.

<sup>373</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 12.



books each on the Old and New Testaments... These little Assamese books are being used in several of our Mission schools...<sup>374</sup>

In a later entry, she notes with excitement:

...My new book, Part II of “Peep of Day” has just come from the press. We rejoice in anything that helps to make known the Gospel in Assamese. The book is full of little pictures and looks inviting in the bright coloured covers. Mr. Swanson has asked for 100 copies to use in camp and school work...<sup>375</sup>

Despite what Patricia Hill illustrates as the rise of a new professionalism in women’s mission work in the late nineteenth century, almost resembling male professionalism<sup>376</sup>, the missionary wives occupied an un-organised and un-professionalized entity. It is safe to say that they were never an active part of this rise in professionalization, one of the most basic reasons being that they were not paid for their labours. This is not to imply that they went out with their husbands merely as spousal supports. They functioned as “helpmeets” in every sense of the word, multi-tasking actively with their husbands in the mission field, and also joining forces with other professional female missionaries in the field, as in the case of Jessie Moore. However, if “foreign missions were the focus of ambition and the stuff of dreams for young women,”<sup>377</sup> it was an entirely different ball-game for a young wife setting out for foreign shores as an appendix to her husband. If young lady missionaries saw postings at foreign missions as career advancement prospects, a missionary wife had only the prospect of being a *silent* and *unacknowledged* partner to her husband.

Jessie Moore was an active participant in preaching to children by the roadside, another un-organised area of missionary labour. These were the activities they used to carry out on these expeditions:

...Miss Long and I enjoy our work among the children by the roadside. Last evening, we had 30 children about us. We teach the little First Catechism, or explain a picture on the life of Christ. Some of the children can sing one of our

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<sup>374</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 123-4.

<sup>375</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 135.

<sup>376</sup> Hill. 90-92.

<sup>377</sup> Hill. 9.

Christian hymns and repeat a Bible verse. We often give them little picture cards or an Assamese leaflet...<sup>378</sup>

A particularly un-organised nature of work in the mission fields involved going out to public spaces like the market-places and doing hand's on evangelizing to the natives. Distributing/selling booklets, tracts, street-side preaching, were all included in such activities and female missionaries had a huge role to play in this exercise too. Jessie talks about preparing for one such activity, when the streets will be filled with people celebrating Durga Puja. It is a good time for the missionaries to reach out to many potential recruits in one day:

...Crowds of people are in from the villages, and we shall go out among them this afternoon and tell some of them the only way of salvation from sin. It is a good opportunity to distribute leaflets and sell gospels and tracts...<sup>379</sup>

Hill's assertion about the rhetoric of domesticity and the subsequent silence of mission historiography on the contributions of women are soundly justified, as recent scholarship has shown time and again. It has been reiterated by several commentators on protestant mission historiography that women's contribution to the evangelizing crusade has been largely left unacknowledged. Rereading Moore's accounts as a legacy of the significant but unacknowledged work done by women for women would add to the volume of this debate.

Helen Barrett Montgomery, the American social reformer, policymaker and the first woman president of the Northern Baptist Convention pushed strongly for stronger participation of women in foreign missions in her 1910 book *Western Women in Eastern Lands: An Outline Study of Fifty Years of Woman's Work in Foreign Missions*. Declaring the nineteenth century as the "Woman's Century," she termed the organization of Women's Missionary Societies "but one of a remarkable series of movements among women." Women's involvement in the missionary societies, she claimed, "crystallized so as to revolutionize many conceptions regarding the *proper sphere and activities of women*."<sup>380</sup> [emphasis mine].

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<sup>378</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 64.

<sup>379</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 13.

<sup>380</sup> Montgomery. 8.

Stressing on the importance of women's presence in foreign mission fields, Montgomery writes that when "the first women" were sent out as missionaries, they came across "the most difficult problem of the whole field." This was, in her words, "the winning of heathen women and girls for Christ."<sup>381</sup> She suggests that if there were stumbling blocks and lack of progress in the course of missionary works, it was because:

...in the beginning of modern missions attention had been concentrated naturally on men and boys, for they were the only ones who were get-at-able. Then, too, there was a certain superiority in the attitude of the masculine world, at that time, which made it very difficult for men to realize that these ignorant, heathen mothers and wives, so far from accepting meekly the changed religious views of their sons or husbands, actually were able to drown all new ideas by the dank weight of their foolish superstition. The whole world was going to school to learn that a nation can be lifted no higher than its women will permit...<sup>382</sup>

And:

...two generations of hard experience had forced upon missionaries, and through them, upon the Boards at home, the conviction that the citadel of heathendom was in the heathen home, and that this citadel could be taken only by the assault of women...<sup>383</sup>

Thus the suggestion that:

...the education of girls is the quickest method of elevating the home life of the East. These educated girls make better mothers, better wives, better housekeepers, than their untrained sisters...<sup>384</sup>

Thus in keeping with this agenda of chaste domesticity, the boarding-school girls of Nowgong are given suitable presents on Christmas day:

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<sup>381</sup> Montgomery. 86.

<sup>382</sup> Montgomery.

<sup>383</sup> Montgomery. 87.

<sup>384</sup> Montgomery. 105-6.

...Mrs Playfair, the wife of our Deputy Commissioner, gave all the presents for the tree. For the older girls there were little work-baskets containing scissors, needles, thimbles, etc. The two youngest girls received dolls...<sup>385</sup>

Despite Montgomery's vocal criticism of past mission policies and outlook, and her proposal for greater independence and participation of American women in mission fields, she simultaneously censures "heathen" women for not "accepting meekly" the dictates of patriarchy. While challenging the patriarchal set-up of mission politics at home, she also argues for the toppling of a perceived matriarchal status quo in Eastern lands. Her conclusions also problematise the whole arena of mission works and the systematic manner in how work in the mission field was gendered and tacitly categorized into male and female domains. As far as the mission objective of uplifting the plight of women, girls, orphans or other unfortunates in society, there are a lot of discrepancies and contradictions in just exactly what "upliftment" of the natives meant to the missionaries and to what degrees such an ideal could be fostered.

On the flip side, if passivity was no longer considered as the ideal for Western women, they too were trapped within conventions, and within the demands of their mission fields, just how active they were expected to be. The active participation of female missionaries in foreign fields came with a baggage of checks and balances, where individuality meant staying put in certain set roles of professionalism defined for her by the board at home.

This complexity of adjustments and balances faced by the woman missionary is clearly illustrated by Susan Haskell Khan. She shows how after the event of the First World War, there were nationwide discussions in India about the status of women, and the importance of missionaries' educational institutions for women which also simultaneously challenged the westernizing and evangelical focus of missions. As a result, women missionaries found themselves in an ironic position. They found themselves in the position of claiming rights for Indian women, the very rights which they themselves did not enjoy in their churches back at home.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 91.

<sup>386</sup> Khan, Susan Haskell. "From Redeemers to Partners: American Women Missionaries and the 'Woman Question' in India, 1919-1938." *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*. Eds. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 142-4. Print.

Confronted with the necessity of educating mothers and girls, it was automatically inferred that this responsibility would fall on the lot of the female missionaries and the missionary wives. Montgomery states, “The importance of this work within the home cannot be exaggerated.”<sup>387</sup> And since women missionaries had more access to the home, the domestic sphere as their arena for proselytising comes as a given, where the softer touch of a woman would be more readily accepted in the “hidden sources of conservatism.”<sup>388</sup> The missionaries making inroads into the stronghold of the Zenana are advised to conduct their evangelism in a number of ways:

...wherever there is the tiniest crack in the closed door of the Oriental high-class home, they go to teach embroidery or English, to read a book, to show some pictures of strange, far-away America, to comfort a mourning mother. Whatever the errand, the little Bible goes too, and the call ends with that. Hundreds of these shut-in ladies learn to read their Bibles and to love them...friendships are made, new ideals are formed...Exquisite tact and sympathy must be the portion of the successful zenana worker; patience with stunted minds and sluggish wills...<sup>389</sup>

There are instances in Jessie Moore’s narratives when she writes about visiting native women, who would be otherwise inaccessible to a male missionary, and attempting to win them over for Christ. There are also times when non-Christian women visit Jessie at home, perhaps out of genuine curiosity or merely for a chance to talk with a “western” woman. She writes:

...We have just had a call from Mrs. Ramdurlabh Mozumdar and her daughter, Miss S. Mozumdar. They belong to the Brahmo Somaj religion, and are more enlightened than most natives. They are willing to accept much of our Bible, but do not believe Christ is Divine...<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Montgomery. 110-11.

<sup>388</sup> Montgomery. 111.

<sup>389</sup> Montgomery. 110.

<sup>390</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 64.

As a woman, Jessie finds it easier to come into contact with potential female converts, and she finds herself even invited into their houses:

...A nice Musulman woman invited us into her house. She can read slowly, and I will take her an easy book and try to encourage her to persevere in reading...<sup>391</sup>

Rhonda Ann Semple examines how gendered notions of women's roles in religion and society shaped the recruitment of female mission personnel. She also adds that such notions contributed to the creation of a specific mission rhetoric, 'women's work for women.' Women had particular 'skills' to contribute in mission building. These skills expanded the idea of what constituted valid mission labour, which changed the concept of mission professionalism.<sup>392</sup>

Mrs Moore's skills, as far as can be surmised from her accounts, lay largely in fostering relationships with native women and proselytising to the young ones. The excerpt quoted below stresses how absolutely vital the area of roadside preaching was, to win young converts. It also exemplifies Jessie's active participation in the venture, which was perceived as an informal area of evangelising and therefore a suitable activity for missionary wives to take up:

...I have been out three afternoons this week to teach children (and older ones) by the roadside. I hang up a big coloured Bible picture, and soon have a crowd about me, and can tell them of Jesus and the only way of salvation. I also teach the children to commit to memory the little First Catechism, and some hymn such as "Jesus loves me," or a Bible verse, and give out some religious leaflets to those who can read, and sometimes picture cards to the children...<sup>393</sup>

Semple links the study of gender in missions to the growing body of work that deals with the contribution women made to the process of Empire-building:

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<sup>391</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 65.

<sup>392</sup> Semple. 2-3.

<sup>393</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 134.

...The mission rhetoric of women's work for women opened opportunities for Western females and highlighted the necessity for women's professional development. Advocates for women's increased role in missions argued that it was only distinctly feminine characteristics that could 'save the heathen', not only spiritually (evangelism) but also physically (social welfare)...<sup>394</sup>

While the rhetoric of women's work for women opened professional opportunities for western females and foregrounded the necessity of mission work for women's professional development, such contributions remained "undervalued" in the patriarchal parlance of Empire-making:

...rather than simply providing a romantic portrayal of fulfilled professional freedom, the history of professional bodies emphasises that women's labour in the Empire, and in missions in particular, remained undervalued in terms of both remuneration and administrative advancement until well into the twentieth century...<sup>395</sup>

She contends that gender as a category was "instrumental in shaping the different ways in which male and female missionaries approached and described their work and personal life."<sup>396</sup> Talking in the context of British foreign missions, she identifies the different nuances and stances that nineteenth century British men and women writing from the fields assumed. While men were taught to apply the straightforward language of business to various situations, women's writings reflected complicated connections that defined their private and professional lives.<sup>397</sup> This perspective, as we have seen, holds true in the case of Jessie Moore's narratives too.

To illustrate her contention, Rhonda Semple highlights the principles of the Scottish Presbyterian missions who followed the teachings of Protestant Reformers like John Calvin and John Knox. Such precepts maintained that "man and women existed in a natural order created by God in which women are subordinate to men." As a result, the church administration had a clearly masculine structure which centered on male elders, with women

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<sup>394</sup> Semple. 6.

<sup>395</sup> Semple.

<sup>396</sup> Semple. 8.

<sup>397</sup> Semple.

members playing marginal yet crucial supporting roles.<sup>398</sup> These skewed roles that Semple points out rings true in the set-up of the American Baptist mission as well, and in other denominations too. In the arena of the foreign missions, the division of labours and roles emerge in an especially glaring manner.

However, Semple shows that this masculine structure of church administration came to be gradually challenged by the increased participation of women, albeit in their supporting roles. Women's work in missions, she says, led to situations that challenged traditional gendered roles, and even the nature of the church itself.<sup>399</sup> There were pressures that caused the "nineteenth century male mission workers to be unwilling, and perhaps even unable, to discuss the more personal aspects of their life and work."<sup>400</sup> It is seen that conventions about gender informed private belief and the professional manifestation of belief. Participation in family and social networks were gendered processes as such. Thus women traditionally filled the significant vacuum, or bridged the gap into that no men's land:

...despite the fact that family and social networks included men, both participation in, and perceptions of, these networks were gendered processes. Men were supposed to support their families by labouring outside the home; women created and maintained social boundaries involving family, material culture, religious beliefs, and racial hierarchies, which reinforced professional difference...<sup>401</sup>

The perceived need of male missionaries for companionship and domestic support, according to Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, together with underlying fears of "sexual misconduct" made a wife "a necessary asset" in the mission field. This was the reason why so many mission societies insisted on equipping men with suitable companions before recruiting them for the cause of foreign missions.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Semple. 137.

<sup>399</sup> Semple.

<sup>400</sup> Semple. 194.

<sup>401</sup> Semple.

<sup>402</sup> Grimshaw and Sherlock. 181.



## The Happy Families Project

Life in a Jane Austen novel becomes infinitely better after its characters enter into matrimonial alliances. So also it seems on a mission compound, where the native converts are paired-up and married off as soon as they are deemed “eligible.” It is not easy to ignore the number of marriages that are mentioned in Moore’s journals, and sometimes she gives reasons as to why a certain person had to be married off. Sometimes the alliances come about as a result of mutual affection between the parties, and more often the marriages are arranged by the missionaries between individuals who seem to share common (religious) interests. Mostly, such alliances were considered as a credit to the whole mission effort, all in the cause of creating proper Christian families who would contribute to the advancement of the mission. The most significant thing here is that, the question of marrying off native Christians to other eligible Christians, and the amount of missionary intervention in bringing about such events remained unchanged from Eliza Brown’s days. I have discussed this point in Chapter Two, about how missions encouraged Christian matrimony among native converts modelled on a European notion of family systems.

On the subject of marriage and respectability of the native girls, Jessie Moore assumes a characteristically staunch Victorian attitude, where a good marriage was supposed to “save” wayward girls from eternal ruin. Here she writes about an incident in the boarding school:

...Miss Long and Miss Miller have just had their first real shock as to the way in which natives can deceive us. It will also make them see the need of letting girls marry younger in this country than in more civilized lands. A very quiet wedding of one of our schoolgirls took place this week in order to save the girl...<sup>403</sup>

Fanon, while talking about the confrontation between colonial and native worlds, describes the perceived polarities of value systems:

...native society is not only described as a society lacking in values. It is enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better

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<sup>403</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 83-4.

never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces...<sup>404</sup>

The disciplining and education of the school girls were left fully at the discretion of the female missionaries and the missionary wives. Moore describes an incident with the students which would very well have ended in a scandal for the school, but for the intervention of the police. It might have been a similar case of rebellion that led her to talk about the “need of letting girls marry younger in this country...” She writes about “a little excitement this morning” in the boarding school:

...it was discovered that three of our boarding-school girls had run away. We wired the police to catch the girls, and they were found at Raha...they were given some food...and then they were marched back home. They arrived here at 10 P.M. and were tired and sorry girls. We are glad to get them back safely, and hope they have learned a good lesson...<sup>405</sup>

The creation of newly converted Christian families becomes a problematic concept, once we consider the cultural transformations and negotiations involved in the whole process of constructing “happy families” on a distinctly European model of domesticity. Usually, the missionary wife or a female missionary in the field acted as the main facilitator of such unions, and she continued to maintain an interest in the spiritual and worldly well-being of the new family. The figure of the missionary wife, or the female missionary emerges as a study in contrasts in such a process of cultural, familial and social re-imaginings of the native universe. Strong yet meek, independent yet domesticated, emancipated (within a certain permissible degree), she was a role model that native female converts were expected to emulate as archetypes of Christian womanhood.

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<sup>404</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963. 41. Print.

<sup>405</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 9.

At times, in the reimagining of mission historiography, the processes of cultural traditions enter into a state of fluidity or hybridity, spelling out large-scale upheavals in the worldviews of native converts. How exactly are these negotiations presented then, in the literatures of mission historiography such as Jessie Moore's journals?

A certain "taint" of sin allegedly and invariably follows in the wake of civilizing missions, according to the critics of missions. In a twist of irony, nineteenth century missionaries to the Polynesias imposed and facilitated structures such as marriage, institutionalized labour, and trade which radically altered Polynesian society and brought about its "fall from innocence." So civilization brought its inevitable by-products, "guilt and shame" to the South Pacific.<sup>406</sup> The missionaries in Polynesia considered idleness as a "positively wicked" attribute and were convinced that "only Christianity could redeem this debased society." As such, labour was a necessary pre-condition to build up the moral character of the idle, and therefore, depraved native. The emphasis on a strict work-ethic was soon followed by a cultural reshaping in the Polynesias, where missionaries stressed on the importance of sound, stable marriages as opposed to sinful promiscuity. The promulgation of the family ideal, Sarah Johnson says, led to "Happy Christian families" which became "potent symbols of missionary success."<sup>407</sup>

However, the very success stories of mission produced mainly for the benefits of contributors/parishioners at 'home' are suspect, and not as straight-forward as they appear to be. In fact, mission stories of happy endings usually contain problematic references to a larger agenda of cultural imperialism. Frantz Fanon notes that:

...the triumphant *communiqués* from the missions are in fact a source of information concerning the implantation of foreign influences in the core of the colonized people... The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church. She does not call the natives to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor...<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Johnson. *Missionary Positions*. 180-1.

<sup>407</sup> Johnson. *Missionary Positions*. 185-92.

<sup>408</sup> Fanon. 42.

Perhaps it is this desire to publish the successful establishment of newly minted Christian families that explains the frequency with which matrimonial alliances are mentioned in Moore's journals. For example:

...To-day another native wedding. This is the third one of our schoolgirls married within one month...<sup>409</sup>

Another wedding is mentioned with some attempt at humour:

...Sunday. After the usual preaching service to-day the marriage ceremony was performed for a couple from Udmari. The bride found it difficult to answer when it came her turn to speak...<sup>410</sup>

It was not enough simply to educate the natives. A missionary's duties extended beyond providing the rudimentary reading and writing skills to a convert. In many cases, the missionaries acted as "matrimonial agencies," ensuring that the pupils they had so painstakingly uplifted remained in the fold and contributed to the "happy families" project. A complete overhaul of cultural, religious and social values was necessary to oversee the success of the happy families project, because the old values simply did not belong in the new order. Marriages happen with such regularity among the native Christians once they have been converted and educated that the mission officials decide to procure their own "Marriage Registrar":

...Babu Henry will soon be "Marriage Registrar" (as we have applied to Government for this authority for Henry), and then he can tie the knot for the village Christians...<sup>411</sup>

It is obvious that the matrimonial ceremonies conducted by the church mislead many non-Christians. Jessie narrates the amusing anecdote of the "Police Bugler" for her readers:

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<sup>409</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 8.

<sup>410</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 9.

<sup>411</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 98.

...when out walking I have sometimes given Christian leaflets to the Police Bugler, and I always noticed what a happy open face he has. Yesterday he came to our house and said: "I have read your books, your religion is good, and I want a girl, as I want to get married."...Pitt and two Christian men had a good talk with him. After explaining to him that religion is one thing, and getting married another thing, they explained somewhat the way of atonement through Jesus...<sup>412</sup>

It is not revealed whether the Police Bugler became a convert. It may also be inferred from the anecdote that the boarding-school girls were somewhat in demand among the native population (non-Christians included), the missionaries being seen by the natives as people responsible for producing respectable house-wives, sort of like a finishing school.

In a telling passage, Helen Montgomery enthuses about creating a "new kind of wife" out of the educated native girls:

...American school-teachers, whether they wish or not, often find themselves running very flourishing matrimonial agencies, as they train the new kind of wife to go with the new Christian home...<sup>413</sup>

Montgomery's statement is loaded, as it suggests that emancipation through education comes with certain re-imaginings of native femininity. But exactly what sort of emancipation is available and to what degree? In such an instance, we see categories of womanhood drawn up, where the native woman is trained to fit into certain given roles of domesticity. Education in this context then, one might suppose, instead acts as an enforcer of a whole set of imported cultural ethos, imposing new restrictions on the native woman instead of emancipating her lot. True, Montgomery does declare that the nineteenth century ideal of femininity is not a desirable role model for contemporary *western* women:

...women at the beginning of the century were feebler in frame than their athletic great-grand-daughters, given to fainting and hysteria, and so circumscribed by proprieties that they hardly dared move for fear of offending

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<sup>412</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 99.

<sup>413</sup> Montgomery. 106.

one or more of the standards of correct female behaviour...we have no patience with these heroines who promptly faint when any emergency faces them, and long to shake them into some sort of sense...<sup>414</sup>

Notwithstanding the revolutionary assertions made above, transcending traditionally and socially defined roles proved easier said than done, even for women taking apprehensive first steps into the professional domains of medicine, education, or missions. Providing illustrations from the history of women's struggle for higher education in nineteenth century America, Patricia Hill says that "increased access to higher education, however, generally meant more thorough preparation for teaching or enlightened domesticity." Thus, educating a woman implied only one thing, and that was "largely confined to making them better wives and mothers or training them as teachers."<sup>415</sup>

A glance at the "closing exercises" of the station school in Nowgong gives us an idea of a typical curriculum of missionary schools: According to Mrs Moore:

...Mary and Nomra had trained some of the little ones to recite nicely, and all sing well these days. Mohesor read a good essay on: "Education for Women." The names of the girls who did the best work in sewing were read off. Some good advice was given, etc...<sup>416</sup>

Apart from wedded bliss, teaching seems to be the only career prospect available for former boarding-school students in the Nowgong institution. It is a well-run, self-sufficient establishment, where the most promising graduates are nurtured by the missionaries to become teachers in the institution. The success stories of mission education are clearly illustrated by Moore:

...Neyai Pandit will go to Jorhat to read in the "Masters Training Class, Upper Primary and Middle Vernacular" for one year. Guluk will take Neyai's classes in the morning for a time. Nomra and Mary also teach in our school. Neyai will

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<sup>414</sup> Montgomery. 4.

<sup>415</sup> Hill. 40.

<sup>416</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 183.

be greatly missed but we want him to qualify for more advanced work in our school...<sup>417</sup>

Dana Robert shows how women have “deliberately crossed cultures to witness to their faith” as unpaid wives of official male missionaries, as unmarried women, and as “ordinary migrants or people on the move.” Women missionaries concentrated largely on lifestyles of service and personal relationships as the way to spread the gospel, since they were denied the opportunity to be priests, preachers, and ordained clerics throughout most of the history of Christianity. The partnership between men and women in missions is one where men have been in charge of building up the institution of the church while women look after the people’s day-to-day needs. However, Robert says that because mission work often takes place on the margins far from the centers of power, this situation sometimes allow women to assume leadership roles which might be unavailable to them in their home countries.<sup>418</sup>

## Conclusion

Jessie Moore was persistent, almost compulsive about the details, facts and figures she provided to her readers. Births, deaths, marriages, and baptisms spanning the mission trajectories are faithfully recorded along with the daily details of life in the mission field. It is a narrative where no detail is considered too trivial or unimportant for the reader, it is a story told with great care. Jessie Moore in her narratives tried to make missions ‘real’ to her readers; she tried to acquaint her readers with vignettes of world affairs happening around them, information about the place she and her husband laboured in, but most of all, she provided a chatty, conversational narrative about the everyday life of missionaries. For me, this is one of her most important contributions to the existing literature about missionary accounts, and to the literature of travel accounts written by women. Mrs. P. H. Moore created a space in her journals which provides a challenging new perspective on such literatures. I see this new perspective as an arena of an unapologetic domestic space, a space which subtly insisted on its validity, a space which could not to be dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant.

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<sup>417</sup> Moore. *Further Leaves*. 182.

<sup>418</sup> Robert, Dana L. *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 119. Print.

Most of the letters, diaries or other accounts written by female missionaries may have been lost, forgotten, or gathering dust in some corner. But the fact remains that, they wrote, and they wrote a lot, not only because keeping up with correspondence fell to their lot, but for numerous other reasons. At this point, it seems appropriate to let Gilbert and Gubar have the last word on the subject:

...most specifically, however, the one plot that seems to be concealed in most of the nineteenth-century literature by women which will concern us here is in some sense a story of the woman writer's quest for her own story; it is the story, in other words, of the woman's quest for self-definition...<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Gilbert and Gubar. 76.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

*...God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must – shall be...*

St. John Rivers to Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

One of the objectives in writing this thesis was to retrieve or recover the accounts of missionary wives in the North East of India, specifically Assam and Nagaland (formerly the Naga Hills District of Assam). To call the narratives created by the missionary wives in these parts of the country “forgotten” would not be an exaggeration but on the other hand, to call these writings “neglected” seems apt, for some of them are readily available in print with modern day publishing houses. Of the three texts I engaged with, the narrative that seemed the hardest to access was *The Whole World Kin*, which included bits and parts of letters written by Eliza Brown during her residence in Burma and Assam. This text proved the most difficult to track down because of the very fact that it had gone out of publication (out of circulation too from physical libraries, it would seem), and would most likely have remained lost or forgotten if it hadn't been for the sheer amount of archival materials available online for interested parties. These were the practical challenges that the texts presented at the outset.

Taking together three different texts of three different women, women of different generations so to speak, I tried to present the narratives created by them as a fluid continuity of representative writings by wives of American Baptist missionaries in the North East of India. For example, close readings of the texts led one to the glaringly naive and obvious questions such as, “Are there commonalities in their texts?” “How is Eliza Brown similar to/different from Mary Clark? Or Jessie Moore?” etc, etc. However, the most persistent and nagging question was, how far has Jessie Moore travelled from Eliza Brown? I hope I have managed to provide a sufficient response to this in the chapters discussed. Suffice it to say, the most important discovery on reading the texts was that, despite their superficial

commonalities of gender, denomination, education, nationality and so on, these women were distinctly their own persons, possessing their own individual personalities as is evidenced through their writings. A list of things that binds them to each other will be many and exhaustive, but so would be an attempt to extrapolate on the individuality of their personalities.

Due to numerous constraints there were some aspects I had not attempted to address, one of the main reasons being the fear that it would also disfigure the whole thematic structure of my own narrative as I moved forward from one chapter to the next. I believe there are several things that can be looked at which would add greatly to the current discourses, several issues that would be exciting for a researcher in the area to grapple with. I will try to briefly talk about some of the issues I ignored/omitted, and the challenges and scope they present for further research.

*The Whole World Kin* contains the letters of Eliza and her husband Nathan Brown. These letters, in Eliza's case, were written during the span of her stay in Burma and Assam. For her husband, they encompassed the entire career of his missionary service, from the Burma chapter, to Assam, and then to Japan after the death of his wife. This book has a lot of practical challenges, as I pointed out in my Introduction. On another level, the letters of Eliza and Nathan Brown, read together, juxtaposed in terms of the specific items of interests presented by the writers, the language employed by them, about what the letters reveal about their writers, will indeed prove to be a fascinating exercise in my opinion.

Nathan Brown's contribution to the emergent literary and translation works in Assamese were considerable, more so with the inception of *Orunodui* in 1846 "...a Monthly Magazine devoted to Religion, Science, and general Intelligence..."<sup>420</sup> Fresh out of America, at his first mission assignment in Burma, Brown applied himself to the study of the language so much so that Eliza despairingly wrote to a relative in the winter of 1833, "...I have strong apprehensions,...that your brother Nathan is committing suicide studying Burman palm-leaves..."<sup>421</sup> Romanising the native languages of India remained a constant source of interest for him, and he continued similar work even with the Japanese language, where he lived out the last years of his life.

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<sup>420</sup> Brown, 416.

<sup>421</sup> Brown, 73.

In a letter dated 1867, Nathan Brown writes:

...Thirty-five years ago, Sir Charles Trevelyan and Rev. William H. Pearce, in concert with other scholars and missionaries, conceived the plan of substituting Roman for native characters in printing the languages of India. Prof. Max Müller, of Oxford University, now published his ‘Missionary Alphabet,’ bringing the various plans which missionaries had used or suggested, into an orderly and complete system...<sup>422</sup>

The contributions by missionaries like Nathan Brown and others in the field of language, especially in classifying languages spoken by people inhabiting remote and otherwise inaccessible parts of the country cannot be easily overlooked. Prof. Müller openly acknowledges the importance of Brown’s contributions to his studies in a letter of 1854 to Sir Charles Trevelyan:

...I return Mr. Brown’s letter with many thanks – it is a very interesting letter – it has turned a name with which I have been familiar for many years, into a real man, and what a man!...I should like to write to Mr. Brown, and to send him my book on the Turanian Languages, where I have had to quote him so many times. He is one of the few men whose opinion I should like to have on the classification of these dialects on the borders of India and China, which I have attempted there for the first time...<sup>423</sup>

To sum it up briefly, a serious look at the works and letters of Nathan Brown concerning his literary and translation works, which could not be addressed in this thesis would indeed be an engaging topic for further research.

In Chapter Two, “The Letters of Eliza Brown: Stances of Domesticity and Emancipation,” I put forward the contention that written accounts of missionary wives were complex in their attitudes and perspectives. Such ambiguities in their stances, as I have demonstrated from Eliza Brown’s letters, were formed due to the conventional paths they were expected to tread

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<sup>422</sup> Brown, 105.

<sup>423</sup> Brown, 602.

by their own religious and socio-cultural conditionings on one hand, and on the other hand, by the message of emancipation they offered as a most covetable ticket out of oppression to their native female converts.

In the same chapter, I have presented the extreme emphasis that missionary societies put on the selection of suitable wives or helpmeets for a young missionary recruit. Qualifications such as a modest post-secondary education, zeal in mission work, a solid grounding in moral and ethical values, an adept knowledge of domestic economy, and an over-all self-sacrificing nature were considered formidable additions to the resumé of a missionary wife. Such care and consideration taken by missionary societies on the question of suitability reflects the undeniable importance the role of a missionary wife entailed.

To explain the rise of American women's participation in overseas mission work, especially from the late nineteenth century till the mid twentieth century, I have shown Leslie Flemming's approach and how he links the phenomenon with certain historical and cultural events that took place in nineteenth century America. This leads us to Flemming's premise that missionaries preached a "cult of domesticity" to their female converts, but mission narratives attest to a more complex picture than this simple premise. For, while women like Eliza Brown were advocating meek and domesticated Christian womanhood to the female converts, they were showing glimpses of emancipation to the women through literacy, and thus modernity. Ambiguities like these make us question then, if emancipation has a limit, or if eastern emancipation is made to operate on a different standard from western emancipation, or even, if the missionary wives were themselves fully emancipated of the yoke of domesticity.

One interesting feature of Eliza Brown's evangelism, described as a "success," was when she would act out mimes of Assamese beggar women during meetings of the ladies' sewing circles. Such activities took place on her furloughs in America, when missionaries and their wives would speak at public meetings, churches, organise prayer meetings and such, for the purpose of soliciting funds, and to enlist more missionary volunteers for their overseas mission fields. I have pointed out how there is a conscious construction at work here, the typecasting of helpless eastern women needing redemption from temporal and spiritual matters. Eliza also mentions specific incidents in the mission fields, where slave-girls or orphans turn up begging to be saved.

The Browns during their evangelism in Assam worked out a specific mission methodology, which can be described as a pioneering effort, since they were in many ways, the first missionary couple with a proper mission station in Assam at the time. The steps involved in the rehabilitation of the “heathen” would include, firstly, the “rescue” of the proverbial unfortunates of society such as the widow, the orphan-girl, the slaves, etc. After the rescue, they would be inducted into the literacy project where they would not only learn how to read and write, but would be taught the scriptures, hygiene, housekeeping and other practical skills. These would be followed by a gradual induction into women’s prayer meetings, conversion, baptism, and ultimately, a good Christian marriage with a suitable mate. Such a methodology went a long way in adding Christian families into the mission compound set.

The chapter contends that while female missionaries of the Baptist mission in Assam encouraged a ridding of the burden of native womanhood, they encouraged a very specific type of womanhood. This new womanhood came with its own socio-religious baggage, with the very notion of innate sin at the very heart of it. Since the nature of western and thereby Christian womanhood was supposed to be one of post-lapsarian sinfulness, the native female converts also inherited this sinful nature by default. But there was good news too, for this sinfulness could be redeemed by saving other heathen sisters from the yoke. A pioneer in many ways, the letters of Eliza Brown, while giving vivid descriptions of early mission work in Assam, confronts us with the finer nuances of ideals such as emancipation and the subsequent onus of domesticity that crop up repeatedly in Contact Zones.

The next chapter is on Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India* which stands out among its contemporaries for the sheer fact that there is very little evangelical activity one usually expects from such a text. There is also, a noticeable toning down of strong religious sentiments usually associated with literature written by missionaries. While mission policies and the politics of publication might have had some influence on the content of the text, she seems to have written it for a bigger audience and not necessarily a “mission” readership at that. Sara Mills says that the existence of a coherent self in textual terms is impossible, and highlights the “truth” question in travel accounts written by women. She adds that, perhaps there are other elements which structure such texts other than ‘authorial intention’. Victorian or early twentieth century female writers were often tagged as ‘spinster’ or ‘old maid’, and

endowed with funny quirks and eccentricities, according to Mills.<sup>424</sup> Mary Clark was neither a spinster nor an old maid, and yet her narrative can easily be found contemporaneous with writings of, say, Mary Kingsley, one of the most well-known ‘spinster’ or ‘old maid’ of that era.

One of the most enriching and valuable ways to read Mary Clark, or any other text by women for that matter, is to look at these texts in a critically analytical way as Mills stresses. Instead of describing these women as remarkable, odd, eccentric or exceptional, it would be better to start with the question of how these women managed to get their works published.<sup>425</sup>

Mary Clark’s ways of seeing or stances, is different indeed from Eliza Brown’s. However, I have presented Clark’s account as a continuation from Brown’s, despite the fact that this second wave of Baptist missionaries from America came to Assam after a hiatus of fourteen years. As already mentioned, Clark does not dwell on her personal evangelical activities in the Hills, such as ministering to widows, orphans, and the physically afflicted. However, it is not to suggest that Clark’s narrative is completely devoid of evangelical nuances and jargons. While Eliza Brown talks about Sunday schools, prayer meetings, preaching by the waysides, organising women’s meetings etc, the activities are muted in Clark. Clark does mention the surge of temperance societies and the enthusiasm of the blue ribbon groups among the new converts.

One reason for the difference in perspective might be because, Clark’s husband the missionary Edward Clark was more interested in literary and translation works among the Ao Nagas. His interest lay more in emphasising on literacy and education, as a way of bringing more converts to the cross. His approach was novel among his contemporaries, who wanted to stress on the evangelical duties of the Baptist dogma. The Clarks are credited with authoring the first Ao-Naga dictionary during their stay in the Naga Hills.<sup>426</sup>

*A Corner in India* is decidedly “colonial” in its aspect in so far that it includes vast observations (along with visual representations) of manners and customs of the people and it also tries to be anthropological in an amateur way on which I have elaborated in the chapter.

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<sup>424</sup> Mills. 30-36.

<sup>425</sup> Mills. 35.

<sup>426</sup> Edward Winter Clark, EW Clark, Mrs. *Ao-Naga Dictionary*. Rpt. Dimapur: Heritage Publishing House, 2013.

She also resorts to the “Jungle Metaphor” exploited by colonial texts of the travel and adventure styles, to suggest an area of fearsome undiscovered darkness throughout the text. A noteworthy incident in the narrative takes place when the “stammering” wild Nagas are overwhelmed by the “light.” They metamorphose to such an extent that the hills start ringing with songs of hope and joy.

For me, one of the most intriguing aspects about the narrative style employed by Mary Clark was her omniscience throughout the text, which also made it a challenging read as far as ascribing chronological events and authorial participation in events were concerned. A reading of other writings by her contemporaries helped to establish Clark’s periods of furlough in America and absence from the Hills, which were frequent due to health reasons. It is a known fact that her husband laboured mostly alone in the Hills without the proverbial helpmeet. Thus, the text proved to be a challenging read in more ways than one.

Such a haphazard, random way of telling gives rise to questions of authenticity of experience, because in the text, the female authorial voice tends to merge and assume the events experienced by the male figure (Mr. Clark) in the story. Mary Clark’s story, therefore, is mostly experienced second-hand, by proxy through the eyes of her husband’s accounts as I have exemplified with excerpts in the chapter. Aside from the technical challenges presented by such an account, it is difficult to ignore the implications of authorial faithfulness, and the multivocality of voices, since she is surely presenting a variety of stances which are her own and yet not of her own.

While there are unmistakable notes of adventure and romanticism in this account, the account is also balanced by a quasi-scientific effort to gather knowledge and information about the place and the people. I have referenced Barbara Korte’s observation here, that this stylistics employed by travel writers is a “mixture of adventure and ‘serious’ observation.” The notes of adventure and serious observations are further accompanied by a note of self-effacement in Mary Clark, which can be credited to certain textual constraints that Sara Mills mentions while talking about travel writings by women. This attitude is discussed at length in the chapter.

The narration, while illustrating the natural abundance of the region replete with possibilities is often cursory in its attitude toward the people living in it. All their efforts at eking out a

livelihood, all the potential that the land has in store, is all futile because Christianity has not put its stamp on it yet. She suggests that such spaces can be transformed into a land of opportunities, and I have elucidated in this chapter on how this mess of blankness is given form and meaning towards the end of her narration. Much like the structure of her narrative style, the entire Naga Hills emerges as a formless jungle of blank spaces.

The first known work by a colonial agent to focus with seriousness on the Nagas, specifically the Angami tribe, was in 1855 by Major John Butler in his book *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, During a Residence of Fourteen Years*. Other anthropological accounts about the different Naga tribes came much later, in the early twentieth century, and so it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Mary Clark's 1907 *A Corner in India* successfully tries to fill up some of the perceived blank spaces. Thus, when Clark attempts to collect and record information about the Ao Nagas, there must have been the conscious perception that she was going into a territory where no man had ventured before, in every sense of the phrase.

As such, Clark dabbles in some lay person's anthropology by devoting four brief chapters on the manners and customs of the Aos, for the benefit of her readers. The titles are pretty descriptive and would make an anthropologist cringe today, as "The Savage at Home," "Savage Oratory and Visiting Cards," "Savage in Costume and at Work," "Savage Worship and Strange Legends." I found Mary Louise Pratt's "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrows Saw in the Land of the Bushmen" particularly useful in reading these four chapters. The tendency here of the visitor, or the traveller, is to project the manners and customs narrative in a normalizing way, where the Other is fixed in a timeless present. This further opens up deeper implications about power dynamics, assumptions, codification of knowledge systems and the representations of partial facts as the whole truth.

I have also tried to present a similarity in Mary Clark's ways of seeing and representation with the women travellers in America in their accounts of Native American Indians. The palpable presence of dirt, squalor and lack of hygiene are the usual culprits almost immediately recognised by the travellers and duly condemned. However, Clark makes her observations with numerous humorous anecdotes which lighten the telling.

Clark manages to present a 'before-after' picture of the Nagas, and it is a success story, a story with a happy ending. It is true that missionary rhetoric of conquest and expansion



cannot be measured on an equal yardstick with other temporal expansionist agendas. However, the area of difficulty presents itself when missionary rhetoric assumes stances of temporal expansionist projects, when the semantics of missionary narratives echo the language of colonial conquest and rule. Such narratives tend to aggressively dismiss the lived experiences of the ‘before’ story, and superimposes a reconstruction of lives and events in the ‘after’ story.

The next chapter deals with *Further Leaves from Assam* by Jessie Traver Moore, a volume recording day to day lived experiences in a mission compound. As mentioned earlier, Jessie Moore wrote and published several journals during her lifetime, about life in Nowgong, Assam. Moore was not only a faithful writer of journals, but she made numerous contributions to the nascent children’s literature in Assamese. Some of the books she wrote were used as text-books for school children. Unfortunately, it was not possible to incorporate all her works in the thesis but this does not mean that they are not worthy of attention and closer readings. It is my opinion that there is still a huge amount of work that can be done here, as Moore’s writing poses several exciting challenges. Further interaction with her narratives would surely enrich the quality of research in this specific area.

In so many ways, Jessie Moore’s accounts are very different from the accounts of Eliza Brown or Mary Clark, most notably the fact that she signed her name as “Mrs. P.H. Moore,” and her most of her journal entries are about her husband’s activities, his sermons, concerns about her ailing mother in America, and happy entries about her daughter’s medical career, marriage, etc. Moore first and foremost presents herself as a devoted wife, mother, and daughter throughout her entries.

I have described the journals of Jessie Moore as belonging to the genre of the crossover narrative because they encompass and accommodate the various features of journals, diaries, official reports, travel accounts or autobiographies. They provide an important commentary on the events lived by the American Baptists in Assam at the time, since she includes a formidable record of births, deaths, furloughs, retirements and marriages of people connected with the mission. At the same time, her accounts prove as a valuable example about the intricate processes of writing mission historiographies.

Firstly, I have identified a sense of unease in Moore’s account, a reluctance to present herself as she is. Despite writing extensively about people, events and family, there remains a

noticeable vacuum in her writings, due to her tendency to position herself in the background. Most of the time, she positions herself as a raconteur, and nothing more than that. I have used Gilbert and Gubar's term, "Anxiety of Authorship" as a starting point here, in a bid to understand this conscious obscurity of an authorial self. Perhaps Moore was simply following the prescribed mission policies in John Murdoch's *The Indian Missionary Manual* of 1864, one of which stated that the 'right spirit' for a helpmeet would be to stay quietly in the background. I have discussed this in great detail in the chapter. There are also numerous instances where Jessie bows out of the narrative, preferring to present excerpts of someone else's opinion on the matter.

One way in which mission protocol fails to censor her personal opinions is when she talks contemptuously about the 'natives' and native lifestyles. Of course, holding such rigid opinions might have been considered acceptable and proper among the Europeans and Americans at the time. I have also shown how Moore assumes at times a rambling, ill-constructed style of writing, abruptly shifting from one topic to the next in the journals. Susan Pickford calls this 'intuitive subjectivity' a general tendency of women travel writers.

What I found most engrossing about Jessie Moore's writing was her persistence and doggedness in creating a certain kind of narrative, a story of a simple life on a mission field told with care, where no small detail was considered too trivial or too domestic for her readers. She does provide glimpses of social life in Nowgong, but most of the exciting entries are about events taking place in the big cities, far away from the provincial setting in Nowgong. I have suggested that Moore, by acquainting her readers with every detail of a missionary's life, was achieving a two-fold purpose: first, of making missions 'real' to readers at home, and second, to create a discourse in the arena of domestic space which could not be dismissed as irrelevant.

Missionary wives very often serve as publicity machines for their husbands, this has been seen in Mary Clark as she chronicled her husband's successful ventures among the Nagas. We see this too in Moore, as she records her husband's sermons and provides excerpts of his letters written to their daughter. Missionary wives were tasked with numerous responsibilities and the life of Jessie Moore in Assam provides sufficient testimony to this. All too often, the motif of 'duty' is a conspicuous and consistent thread in its different manifestations, from Eliza Brown, to Mary Clark, to Jessie Moore.

Despite claims made by Helen Montgomery of the nineteenth century being the “woman’s century” as I have discussed, this meant nothing but the assuming of more duties and responsibilities for women in mission work. The missionary wife would be the one’s charged with the most tasks, in this century of women, where she would remain silent and unacknowledged. I have shown how greater participation of women and greater assertion of their individuality in mission work resulted in certain repercussions. One of the drawbacks of this was that women were now prescribed a set of professional vocations defined for her by the mission boards. The special tasks of managing female education and using the personal domestic arena as a space for proselytisation fell to the lot of women missionaries, among other things. As far as women’s education was concerned, Jessie Moore’s journals mention the type of curriculum taught to the girls in the school. It is obvious that mission education for a girl has one sole purpose, which was to make them better wives and sometimes teachers.

I have also shown how the missions used to promote the idea of Christian families by arranging marriage unions between eligible converts. Such incidents find a lot of mentions in Moore’s journals. This ideal of family and domesticity assumes a problematic aspect if we take into consideration the fact that such constructions and negotiations were modelled on a distinctly European ideal of family and domesticity. Monogamous, stable marriages were always advocated by the missionaries in preference to, or rather, in fear of sinful native promiscuity. Needless to say, as it has been shown, happy stable families testified to the success stories of the mission endeavour.

Elaine Showalter advocates for an “unearthing and reinterpretation of ‘lost’ works,” and about a unifying voice in women’s literature.<sup>427</sup> To take it a notch further, what binds women like Eliza, Mary and Jessie to each other? Is there a tacit awareness among these women, that they are carrying forward a tradition? Such a consciousness would be problematic in itself, for it then supposes an internalizing of certain ‘womanly’ or ‘feminine’ qualities in their writings, an encouragement of qualities that are efficient yet feminine and sacrificial.

It has been stimulating to work on writings by women who lived at a time of great achievements and pioneering activities. It has been even more exciting to ‘discover’ new

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<sup>427</sup> Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977. 8. Print.

works, to sift through the dust of missions and try to scavenge suitable chapters and passages to fit the tasks in hand. Reading accounts left behind by seemingly ordinary women from unexceptional circumstances who wrote about their loves, their joys and their despairs brought so many perspectives into focus. It also made me realise that just as their writings had faded or gathered dust over the years, their lives too had faded into the background. There is an alarming lack of existing information about the authors of these forgotten books, about what happened to them after they returned to America, what happened in their lives after they wrote their stories, how they lived and died. Some of them found brief mentions in the Obituaries of their husbands, like Jessie Moore. Some survive as passing references in mission reports, and most of them were simply forgotten, like their books.

On this strain, and in conclusion, it feels pertinent to quote Showalter who says:

...In the past, investigations have been distorted by the emphasis on an elite group, not only because it has excluded from our attention great stretches of literary activity between, for example, George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, but also because it has rendered invisible the daily lives, the physical experiences, the personal strategies and conflicts of ordinary women...<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Showalter, 8-9.

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