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**NAGA HILLS BEYOND THE EYES OF THE MISSIONARIES:
REVISITING THE TRAVELOGUES OF YORE**

**Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree**

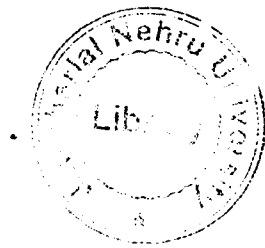
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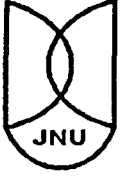
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2006**

For Ayao & Appa...
My First Teachers





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CERTIFICATE

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

A recent trend in postcolonial scholarship has been to examine the implications of texts produced by travellers from the initial period of European voyages of discovery. More than ever, studies have been buoyed by the intimate relationship between travel writing and the history of imperialism and colonization. The literature of travel writing itself as a genre has a long history, as does the use of travel as a literary device. The metaphor of the journey employed as a literary device to represent the passage through life is a firmly established convention, when we consider European medieval poetry such as the journeying of Orlando and his knights, the quests of King Arthur and the denizens of Camelot, and finally the great seafaring journeys of the Norse sagamen.¹

Susan Bassnett opines that, in what may be loosely termed as the Early Modern period in Europe, a great deal of energy and interest were invested in going into expansion outside the boundaries of Europe. The great cycles of heroic questing were accompanied, in the later stages, by the journeys of Henry the Navigator, and by an unprecedented fascination for map-making, and for improving the scientific devices required to undertake long-distance travel. By the sixteenth century, she says, the wandering knight on his eternal quest through the forests, was replaced in popular imagination by the seafarer, bringing back strange treasures from unknown lands beyond the horizon.²

The early travellers sought to describe the new with the perceptual tools and literary conventions of the known world, drawing upon a hoard of images of mythical beasts, tales of the unknown and imaginary worlds, as exemplified in the hugely popular romances of chivalry.³

The history of European travellers in India was particularly intensified after Alexander's invasion during the Hellenic civilization, opening the route for travellers to carry back accounts about India to their lands. However, the first Englishman to come to India was Sighelmus, much after the Greek invasion. He was sent by King Alfred on a pilgrimage to St. Thomas and St.

¹ Susan Bassnett, "The Empire, Travel Writing and British Studies", in Sachidananda Mohanty, ed. *Travel Writing and the Empire*, New Delhi:Katha, 2003, pp. 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3

³ Susan Bassnett, "Comparative Identities in the Post-Colonial World", in Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 87.

Bartholomew in A.D 883, and went back **with a large quantity of jewels and spices**. The next Englishman to come to India after Sighelmus was Thomas Stephens, who set foot on the Salsette coast.⁴

There were also travellers from other parts of Europe who wrote well-known accounts like Marco Polo, Ludovico de Varthema and the **extremely popular** in his day John Mandeville, who perpetrated one of the biggest literary hoaxes.⁵

According to Joan-Pao Rubies, a concern for **establishing the centre of the world in a Christian perspective** had strongly influenced the **geographical literature of the European Middle Ages**, a result, to a great extent, of the **clerical control over culture**. The starting point for a medieval traveller was the figure of the pilgrim, and it still remained so with the narrative of John Mandeville. With the expansion of Europe in **the renaissance**, the new genres tended to develop more like Marco Polo's book of marvels than **Mandeville's natural-Christian synthesis**. Rubies points out how after the fifteenth century, the **pilgrim lost ground steadily to more secularized travellers**-to the practical reporter with specific **aims**, and eventually to a **first-person curious observer free from any obvious external sources of authority**. He argues that this transition did not come as a direct result of the discourses **created by merchants living in the East like Marco Polo and Nicolo Conti**, but rather through the **legitimizing power of a new kind of attitude among the elite**.⁶

Travelling gave rise to different kinds of figures **attributed to the travel writer**. A brief look at the different figures of the two extensive travellers **Nicolo Conti and Ludovico de Varthema**, both connected to India through their travels, will give us an idea about the emergence of the travel writer as an authorial agent in the representation of **other cultures**.

An important contribution exemplifying the mechanism through which a non-clerical **erudite culture and travel literature** became connected is **the fifteenth century report given by the**

⁴ See Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", in Sachidananda Mohanty, *Travel Writing and Colonialism*, New Delhi: Prestige, 2003, p. 42.

⁵ Richard R. Barnett, "Early English Impressions of India", in Balakrishna Gokhale, ed, *Asian Studies Two: Images of India*, Bombay: Popular, 1971, p. 16.

⁶ Joan-Pau Rubies, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India Through European Eyes, 1250-1625*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 85.

Venetian merchant Nicolo Conti. Conti did not write an account of his travels in Asia on his own initiative, but was instead requested to describe his journey to Pope Eugene IV's secretary, the humanist Poggio Bracciolini. Responding to an external prompt and relying on the skills of a more professional writer was not an unusual deviation from a medieval pattern, since in the previous two centuries it had been usual for travellers like Marco Polo, Prince Hayton from Armenia, Friar Odoric of Pordenone, or the Moroccan Ibn Battuta, to dictate their notes and recollections to writers with a specialized knowledge of literary conventions. Nicolo Conti's account is different from the fact that the mediator, Poggio Bracciolini, was a prominent humanist and a leading participant in a profound cultural transformation. This new angle of subjection to the critical scrutiny of a humanist in Conti's account effectively points towards a new pattern that was to dominate the sixteenth century, namely, the dialogue between an unprecedented 'experience of otherness' in a context of discovery and colonization, and the concerns of European intellectuals educated in a thoroughly expanded and revised classical inheritance.⁷

Nicolo Conti was the first European traveller to visit the south Indian city of Vijaynagara, and he accounted his visit to Poggio. In the description of Vijaynagara by Nicolo Conti, the situation, size, and population function as a basic framework, while a few particulars on the king and on marriage and burial customs identify the place further. Particularly, he mentions the limitless polygamy and the practice of widow-burning, which obviously raise some implicit moral questions. Greatness characterizes the city, but also idolatry. In the Christian tradition, the analysis of a non-biblical religion must inevitably take idolatry as its key concept. Conti nevertheless identifies this idolatrous religion as diverse, and provides an analytical structure which makes it comparable to Christianity. Idols, in Christian discourse, are images of false gods, nothing more than a piece of material that has been given a form and worshipped. Conti's treatment, nevertheless, is not condemnatory, but like many other lay travellers without a philosophical education, he does not feel the need to dwell on the definitions and implications of idolatry. The denial of gods was fundamental in medieval Christian art and ideology, but the process was also ambiguous, because sacred images were essential to popular worship. When describing oriental religions Conti follows what can be described as a regular pattern in travel accounts of this period. In the travel literature of this period a detailed description of native

⁷ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

cosmology and mythology is rare indeed, at least until the end of the sixteenth century. The relationship between the image of an idolatrous civilization and European self-understanding is crucial to the theme of a hierarchy of civilizations.⁸

Ludovico de Varthema was the second European traveller to have visited and described Vijaynagara. On his return to Italy in 1508, after seven years in the East, he personally recounted his travels to the Venetian Senate for which he was paid. The written version produced soon afterwards was dedicated to members of one of the leading noble families in Rome, the Colonna-Montefeltro. It was printed in Italian in 1510 with the support of the pope and several of his humanist-trained cardinals, and then immediately translated into Latin. For decades, Varthema's *Itinerario* would figure as one of the key modern authorities concerning the Portuguese discoveries in the East, and remained as one of the most striking successes of travel literature. Having been knighted by the King of Portugal for his services in India, Varthema could also seek to add a social emblem to his authority as traveller. The important issue about Varthema's journey to India and his travel writing is not only the personal description he gave, but more broadly about the kind of role he adopted as traveller and as travel writer, and how this role and this rhetoric related to his intentions. Despite Varthema's efforts to describe a novel world to his contemporaries, he can be seen to have added more to the evolution of images of the traveller than to the evolution of images of the East.⁹

Disguised as a Muslim with a knowledge of colloquial Arabic, Varthema followed the main trading routes that connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. He alternated between playing the roles of merchant, artillery-smelter, physician and fool/saint. With the possible aim of enhancing his role as a famous traveller, it seems likely that at some points Varthema simply reported as direct experience what was only hearsay. His attitude as a writer acutely aware of his own persona could be seen to support the idea that he was prone to exaggerate.¹⁰

In this way Varthema belongs to, and to a certain extent creates, the tradition of the 'curious traveller', the traveller who is not primarily a merchant, an ambassador, a spy, a conqueror, a mercenary, a pilgrim or a missionary, but rather an independent character self-defined by a desire

⁸ Ibid., pp. 105-11.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 125-6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to know other lands and peoples, and to report back on them to his own community of origin. The identity of the traveller is created in the narrative structure as the centre that organizes the world, because what he does and what happens to him provides the main argument, and what he sees or hears is in substance that which the reader learns.¹¹

As a genre, the conventions of travel writing enjoyed much success in England. The immense popularity of travel literature in Elizabethan and post Elizabethan England owes to two traditions, one of which may be termed a general European tradition and another a more specific English tradition. Both envisaged for themselves roles to encourage travel, foster trade, plant ideas of territorial gain along with missionary activity. The travel accounts of Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire, 1656-1668* and Jean Baptiste Tavernier's *Les Six Voyages* enjoyed widespread readership, and the volumes of Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas's *Purchas—His Pilgrimes* ensured that travel writing had arrived in England.¹²

Edward Terry visited India as one of the earliest travellers in the seventeenth century. He was one of the chaplains on the fleet commanded by Captain Benjamin Joseph, and became a chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe on reaching India. He stayed in India for a period of two years, during which time he could see only Gujarat and Malwa, and on his return to England he wrote his observations and presented it to the Prince of Wales. In the footsteps of Terry was Abbe Carre, another traveller from the priestly order of France in the later part of the seventeenth century. Carre's journal is important mainly for observations on missionary activity in southern India, for most seventeenth century travellers confined themselves to Western and Northern India.¹³

An instance of how travel and exploration was encouraged and funded for Englishmen by the Royal Society can be seen by the accounts written and published under the patronage of the society in the seventeenth century. From *An Abstract with Some Reflections on a New Account of East-India and Persia, in Eight Letters, begun 1672 and finished 1681, &c. by John fryer, M. D. Cantabrig and Fellow of the Royal Society. Printed for R. Chiswel at the Rose and Crown in St.*

¹¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹² Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", n.4, p. 43.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 45-47

Paul's Church-Yard. 1698 it is clear that the **Royal Society** was actively involved in accumulating information about the natural history, **cultural studies**, and anything that **qualified** as remote and “different”:

How much the Geography of the present age surpasses that of the Ancients, is sufficiently known to all such as have been at the trouble to examine and compare them; and that not only for the number and Quantity of the Habitable and Inhabited Countries of the World; but for the more exact limitations and boundaries of them; and for more particular Account of the Nature and Products of the Countries themselves...For this in a great measure we are beholding to such Ingenious Spirits as this our Author, who have had the Curiosity not only to travel, view, and inform themselves in the places where they are, but also the Industry to record them in writing...¹⁴

The quest for knowledge was accompanied by the **presupposition** that there were “**inhabited** countries of the world”, waiting for the denizens of **the Royal Society** to catalogue and list aspects of such *undiscovered* terrain. By this time it is clear that the seventeenth century quest for knowledge was at its zenith, to culminate in the **establishment** of England as one of the most powerful imperial power in the world by the **nineteenth century**.

The East India Company came under the control of **Parliament** with Pitt’s India Act of 1784, and the generation of free-wheeling entrepreneurs was **replaced** by administrators and civil servants. The administration of the Governor-General Lord Cornwallis proved to increase the estrangement between Indians and the British in **India**. The covenanted civil service was exhorted not to fraternise with Indians and at the **same time**, Indians were excluded from all positions of responsibility in administration.¹⁵

While Cornwallis was attempting to refashion India in a **British** image, a completely **different** movement was gaining momentum in the late **eighteenth** century, the vast scholarly project commonly known as Orientalism. The outstanding **figure** associated with the **Orientalist** enterprise in India was Sir William Jones, who, **together** with Burke, was probably one of the most influential personalities to mould British and **European** notions about India in the Romantic era. According to Edward Said:

...Jones acquired the effective knowledge of the Orient **and** of Orientals that was later to make him the undisputed founder of Orientalism. To rule and to learn, **then** to compare Orient with Occident: these **were**

¹⁴ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 1698, vol. 20, no. 244, p. 338.

¹⁵ Indira Ghose, ed., *Travels, Explorations and Empire: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion 1770-1835*, Vol 6-India, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2001, p. xv.

Jones's goals...with an irresistible impulse always to codify, to subdue the infinite variety of the Orient to "a complete digest" of laws, figures, customs, and works¹⁶

Appointed as a judge of the High Court in Calcutta in 1783, Jones was inspired by an insatiable curiosity about ancient Indian learning. Fluent in Persian and Arabic, he taught himself Sanskrit and produced translations of Hindu myths for the European public. He translated the Indian play *Sacontala* in 1790 and founded The Asiatic Society in 1784 which went on to become a centre for Oriental scholarship. Its organ, *Asiatick Researches* was widely read by the literati of the Romantic age. Jones was also famous as the discoverer of a common indo-European root to Sanskrit and Latin, which assimilated India into the European cultural tradition and posited a cultural heritage on par with Europe.¹⁷

These events stimulated a rage for Orientalism throughout European society, and perhaps we can say that the great age of the travellers and their accounts about India was fully realised in the nineteenth century. This was a century, in which travel writers freely worked and developed on the commonly held prejudices and stereotypes about India, constructing an image about India from the outside and producing it for readership. Another notable aspect of the nineteenth century is the astonishing amount of women travellers, travelling not only in India but in the other Imperial colonies as well. The accounts of their travels were generally published as travel books, and the genre became a convention which women found themselves constantly appropriating.

One such example we can find is Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (1897),¹⁸ an account of her journey to West Africa in 1893-4, traveling unaccompanied by European companions throughout the West African area with a group of fan tribesmen, who were reputed to be cannibals. The book has been accepted as one of the classic 'eccentric' women travellers' texts, both by conventional critics and by feminists for very different reasons, the former finding it humorous and a 'good read', and the feminists finding it an interesting representation of a determined and self-reliant female.¹⁹

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin 1995, p. 78.

¹⁷ Indira Ghose, ed. *Travels, Explorations and Empire*, n.15, p. x.

¹⁸ See Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, London: Virago, Rpt 1965.

¹⁹ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 153.

Pratt suggests that, women protagonists as writers and travellers, tend to produce ironic reversals when they turn up in the contact zone and she takes the case study of Anna Maria Falconbridge, a British woman. Written in the sentimental mode, her book *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone* (1802)²⁰ is one of the few European travel books about Africa written by a woman before 1850. Gender, marriage and male domination are conspicuous themes in a narrative that sets out to decry the hypocrisy and ignorance of the abolitionists.²¹

Apart from being the 'age of empire', the nineteenth century, on the literary front, was significant for ushering in an increasing interest in travel by women and the production of travel writing by the women of the imperial nations. Accounts about India and the other colonies used to be circulated in the forms of memoirs, letters, journals and diaries by women who travelled abroad to their friends at home. At a time when information about the strange and the exotic was eagerly received by readers at home, these accounts when published, commanded huge commercial successes.

One of the most popular accounts written by a woman during this time was *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* by Fanny Parkes²² in 1850. In her accounts, Fanny Parkes represents the quintessential coloniser's attitude, swinging between the masks and roles of friend and master, an empathiser and possessor, and finally a proud collector of memorabilia, the penchant of the European in India.²³

Adventure and empire were inextricably linked together, as critic Martin Green shows the adventure narrative acts as the 'energising of myth of empire' and, to celebrate adventure was to celebrate empire.²⁴ Since adventure was considered a male domain, adventure narratives were typically appropriated by men, but there were some exceptions as well. When women started writing in great numbers in the nineteenth century, the adventure narratives were at their height

²⁰ See Anna Maria Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*, London: Frank Cass, 1967.

²¹ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 102.

²² Fanny Parkes, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque, During Four and Twenty Years in the East; With Revelations of Life in the Zenana, Illustrated with Sketches from Nature-Vols 1 & 2*, London: Pelham Richardson, 1850.

²³ Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", n.4, p. 60.

²⁴ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure-Deeds of Empire*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 37.

and since this was one of the conventions of travel writing, they adopted the plot form, but very often there was a degree of uneasiness about such adoption as will be described in chapter 2.

Within travel writing, there was established a tradition of textbooks which attempted to determine how other books were written. Travellers were shown how to categorise information into tabular form in a remarkably complex system of categorisation such as Count Leopold Berchtold's *Essay to Direct and Extend the Inquiries of Patriotic Travellers*. There were also textbooks which were addressed specifically to women travellers like Lilius Campbell Davidson's *Hints to Lady Travellers at Home and Abroad* (1889).

While travel writing is characterised by similarities of textual features such as the narrative figure, narrative incidents and the description of objects acting as constraints on writing, most critics only discuss the device of 'narrator' in 'fictional' writing. There is a difficulty in such a situation since we cannot say whether this is due to the fact that they only analyse 'fictional' works, or whether they actually believe that there is no 'narrator' as such in 'non-fictional' works. But it is generally possible to see the narrator as a device through which the narrative becomes comprehensible, as the narrator is a construct which gives coherence to a variety of voices, or discourses.²⁵

An almost canonical figure of the quintessential missionary traveller was David Livingstone, missionary to Africa. Sent by the London Missionary Society to South Africa in the year 1840, Livingstone has gone down in the history of travelling as one of its most famous figures. Perhaps the thesis (in his own words) that "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" was exemplified by him and his works during his life span. Pioneering traveller and missionary, Livingstone found himself drawn more towards exploration and commerce than his mission duties. The latter part of his expeditions hampered his relationship with the London Missionary Society in spite of his recognition from the Royal Geographical Society.²⁶

The nineteenth century was an age which witnessed a marked increase in the arrival of missionary travellers in India with the subsequent setting up of their missions. William Carey's

²⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 19, p. 74.

²⁶ Timothy Holmes, ed, *David Livingstone: Letters & Documents 1841-1872*, London: James Curry Ltd, 1990, p. 3.

arrival was a genesis to the missionary enterprise in **India**, paving the way for subsequent forays into the country. Carey arrived in Calcutta on **November 11, 1793**, aboard the *Princess Maria* with the zeal to do something about the “degraded **state** of heathen lands”. He was denied entry as a missionary on the grounds that the **East India Company** did not permit religious teaching to the colonised people.²⁷ He joined an indigo factory near Malda, and in 1795 with two other Englishmen formed a church at Mudnabutty.²⁸

When the charter of the East India Company came up for renewal by the British Parliament in 1833, the Evangelicals, led by Charles Grant and **William Wilberforce**, had organised themselves into the prominent Clapham Sect.²⁹ The Evangelicals, through a combination of their religious belief and political clout in the British Parliament, **ensured** free entry to the missionary societies, and in 1833 the restriction for missionaries was lifted.

In this state of affairs, the north east region of **India** **was** never considered as a possible site for establishing its mission compounds by the **American Baptist Union**. Instead, the **American Baptist** missionaries hoped to accompany the **government** team to China via Assam to **make** enquiry about the culture of the tea-plants and then **carry** the Gospel to the Chinese **beneath** the protection afforded by the East India Company. It **was** **this** double interest in the China mission and the Burmese mission, which ultimately **constrained** them to open a station at Sadiya at the extreme eastern end of the Brahmaputra valley.³⁰ The paper by Rev. P. H. Moore **presented** during the Jubilee Conference of 1886 looks back to **the** earlier ambition of the Mission with noticeable regret:

The American Baptist Missionary Union occupied Assam in 1836 simply as a step towards entering China from the west. God turned us back, and has kept us here **now** fifty years.³¹

It is interesting how the still *unexplored* north east **region** of India has been witness to a flurry of

²⁷ E. Daniel Potts, “The Baptist Missionaries of Serampore and the Government of India, 1792-1813”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, March 1964, pp. 229-46.

²⁸ B.H. Badley, *The Indian Missionary Directory*, Lucknow: **Methodist Publishing House**, 1892, p. 7.

²⁹ See Earnest Marshall Howse, *Saints in Politics: The Clapham Sect and the Growth of Freedom*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1952.

³⁰ William Cammel, *History of American Baptist Missions in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America*, Boston: 1850, p. 213.

³¹ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, Guwahati: Spectrum, Rpt 1992. (These Papers were first published in 1887 by The Assam Mission of the **American Baptist Missionary Union**).

colonial activity, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Accounts of imperial administrators, anthropologists, missionaries and the occasional prospector all qualify as travel accounts about the region, leaving behind a rich legacy of the colonial “heydays”.

The American Baptists whom I will be discussing in my dissertation were not the only missionary society to operate in the north east. The amount of missionary activity in the region can only be realised when we consider that the American Baptist Missionary Union, in addition to The English Baptist Missionary Union, The Church of England, The Assam and Cachar Mission, The S. P. G. Society, The Indian Home Mission Society, and The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission were also actively proselytising among the natives in different parts of the region.

My objective here is not to deal with missionary accounts pertaining to the entire topography of the north east region, but to narrow down my focus to the accounts of the American Baptist missionaries who were active in Christianising the inhabitants of the Naga Hills, then a part of Assam. By establishing a church in the Hills in 1876, the missionaries began their evangelical activity, which spread further throughout the entire Hills region of Nagaland.

Missionary accounts as travel narratives provide a whole new range of insights, which can be added to the ongoing discourses of colonialism. This recalls Hobsbawm’s contention in *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* when he classifies the missionary activity in the nineteenth century as an agency of imperialist politics:

This was the classic age of massive missionary endeavour. Missionary effort was by no means an agency of imperialist politics. Often it was opposed to the colonial authorities; pretty well always it put the interests of its converts first. Yet the success of the Lord was a function of imperialist advance. Whether trade followed the flag may still be debated, but there is no doubt at all that colonial conquest opened the way for effective missionary action.³²

With the surmise that the missionary activities in nineteenth century were implicated in the entire imperial agenda, I will be discussing a selection of texts in my dissertation. Taking the framework from Edward Said’s thesis *Orientalism*, the politics in which the ‘other’ was constructed will be discussed. The discussions will also draw from Mary Louise Pratt’s

³² E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, Calcutta: Rupa & Co, Rpt. 1992, p. 71.

foundational contribution to travel writing, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. At the same time I will be using the feminist critic Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*.

Edward Said has argued that since the eighteenth century Western writers have constructed the Orient as the other:

Everyone who writes about the orient must locate himself **vis-à-vis** the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the **type of structure** he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which **adds up to deliberate** ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient and finally representing it or speaking **on its behalf**.³³

Said talks about the male writer-explorer here, but it **can be easily** accommodated to include women travel writers too. Missionary texts were, in this **respect**, written and produced for a select readership and targeted at the potential recruit and **sponsor**. In the process of **disseminating** knowledge about the 'heathen' savage, missionaries assumed **god-like** authorship to readily add to the stereotypical images being circulated about the native. **As active participants in the process** of orientalism, they presented a heathen 'other' to the rest of the Christian world, an 'other' who was completely different from them and undoubtedly inferior too.

The basic premise in the orientalist discourse is that **"There are westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated..."**³⁴ There is an **intrinsic power** relationship in the writing of accounts of other cultures. The orientalist, according to Said, **"writes about something"** in contrast to the oriental that is **written** about. For the oriental, passivity is the presumed role while the orientalist writer **assumes** the power to observe, study, and so forth. Here, the oriental remains as fixed, stable, in **need of investigation**, in need even of knowledge about himself. Then finally there is a source of **information** (the oriental) and a source of knowledge (the orientalist), in short, a writer and a **subject** matter otherwise inert. The relationship between the two is radically a matter of power...³⁵

In short, the oriental as a subject was a packaged entity to present to the western consumers, to be written about and to be read about, 'investigated' by the readers. By relegating the oriental

³³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, n. 16, p. 20.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

other to a fixed space in time, the orientalist was locating the oriental in a primitive time zone in contrast with the civilisation of the west. Writers participated actively in this manipulation of power, contrasting anything different or unusual as deviant from their own culture.

The proportion of the 'other' undergoes a subtle change in missionary literatures. The other is not merely an entity requiring investigation and subjected to a fixed position, but also a heathen savage in need of redemption. In this case, conversion and the Christian religion offer to provide the 'saving grace' but only to a certain extent. For, with conversion, the other undergoes a drastic change but only to metamorphose from a barbarian into a child-like adult *still* inferior to the westerners. The subsequent chapters which I will discuss present an illustration of this problematic stance which has been identified in the missionary accounts.

Taking the argument further, Said adds that along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at but 'seen through' analysed not as citizens or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined. The very designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluated judgment, and since the oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected.³⁶

Marie Louise Pratt's phenomenal work on travel literature argues that travel writing is intrinsically linked to the processes of colonisation. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sponsored or institution-backed travel, even when carried out under the guise of more honorific studies and research, often concealed a set of aims, objectives and agenda ulterior in motives. Taking the cue from Pratt's thesis, I have elaborated how the missionaries became the 'organs' or spokespersons for the missionary union operating from the home country, especially with respect to the American Baptist Missionary Union functioning from New York and Boston. Missionaries backed by specific unions adhered to the code of conduct demanded from the union, and I have connected with Sara Mill's take on the constraints on production and reception of travel books.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

Imperial Eyes, as its writer claims, aims to be both a **study** in genre [of travel literature] and a critique of ideology. The predominant theme in the **book** is how travel books by Europeans **about** non-European parts of the world went (and go) **about** creating the “domestic subject” of Euroimperialism and how they have engaged **metropolitan** reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits **accrued** mainly to the very few.³⁷ At this juncture, placing Britain as the Euroimperial power **operating** in India and the North American missionaries as non-Europeans but decidedly **affiliated to the** European expansionist **policy** of “reforming” a people of lesser cultures, I have **undertaken a closer** rereading of the missionary narratives.

My argument is that missionaries working in India **no less** identified themselves **with the** discourses of orientalism and colonialism in vogue at **the time**, especially in the **latter part of the** nineteenth century. How far missionary accounts **were** shaped and determined by **these** discourses and to what extent they contributed to the **politics** of colonisation will be **discussed in** the ensuing chapters.

Following Pratt’s example of how travel and exploration writing *produced* “the rest of the world” for European readerships at particular points in **Europe’s** expansionist trajectory and **how** it has produced Europe’s differentiated conceptions of **itself** in relation to “the rest of the world”, legitimising the aspirations of economic expansion and **empire**³⁸, my study is focused on the American Baptist missionaries as prospectors and surveyors of a yet undiscovered hinterland. By highlighting the possibilities for commerce and expansion **of the** region, at the same time **striving** to create a tamed and obedient native, the missionaries **were** aiding the imperial expansionist policies, albeit indirectly. On the grounds that missionary **literature** produced in and about the north east India abounds abundantly with perceptions of **the natives** as an inferior “other” **thereby** aiding the construction of a superior western “self”, **such** accounts participated the dominant discourses in creating “the rest of the world” for a **Christian/civilised** readership.

Pratt’s concept of the ‘contact zone’ refers to the space of **colonial** encounters, a space in which peoples geographically and historically separated **come into contact** with each other and establish ongoing relations. These encounters usually involve **conditions** of coercion, radical inequality

³⁷ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, n. 21, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5,

and intractable conflict. From the contact zone emerges the phenomenon of ‘transculturation’, which describes how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. The central argument here is 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, and what they use it for.³⁹

The travel accounts produced by the missionaries are widely interspersed with encounters in the contact zone. While establishing their mission on neutral “contact” grounds, there was usually a disproportionate dispersal of power in the contact zone not necessarily involving violence but through the ideological means of the Bible. In this case, masses of natives converted as a submission to the “mission” authorities. How the phenomenon of transculturation was negotiated within the native community is addressed in my rereadings of the missionary accounts.

Marie Louise Pratt’s “contact zone” is synonymous with the “colonial frontier”, but she states that while the latter is a term grounded within a European expansionist perspective, “contact zone” is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term “contact” she foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. According to her, this “contact” perspective emphasises how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonisers and colonised, or travellers and “travellees”, not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.⁴⁰

There is no single narrator in a travel narrative, and Marie Louise Pratt shows that there are essentially two types of travel writing, each with their own narrative figure, termed as the ‘manners and customs’ figure and the ‘sentimental’ figure. The former is largely impersonal, where the narrator is absent, and the latter fore-grounds the narrator. In Pratt’s manners and customs figure, certain statements emanate from an impersonal source which is not identical with

³⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

the narrator who travels from place to place. Pratt says these **statements** come from “an unknown site behind the speaking ‘I’, behind the periphery of what is seen, from a seat of power that should probably be identified with the state”.⁴¹

Pratt’s second type of narrator is the sentimental traveller, **where** the narrator and the individual indigenous inhabitants are portrayed as taking part in a **dramatic** narrative and individuals from the country are presented in dialogue with the narrator, **often** in the framework of the courtly encounter. Whereas the authority of the manners and **customs** type text comes from the informational, scientific nature of its content, the more ‘**experiential**’ text gains authority from the fact that it is concerned with people as individuals.⁴²

However, Mary Mead Clark’s narrative *A Corner in India* **which** I will discuss in Chapter Two negotiates between these two narrative figures to emerge **as a completely** figure, a seeing as well as interacting figure. This could stem from the fact that **she was** conscious of writing as a **woman** in a generally male-dominated domain.

An analysis of travel narratives written by women would **be incomplete** without turning to the immense contribution by Sara Mills to the genre. In **discussing** particular accounts by women missionaries, I have borrowed frequently from Mills **and my** discussion is in part shaped by **her** inputs in *Discourses of Difference*.

Sara Mills begins by locating the travel texts **written by** women during the era of ‘high-imperialism’ firstly by examining how “colonial strength” **was** negotiated in their texts, **proving** contrary the usually accepted convention that they were **not part** of colonial expansion. Her **book** considers the ways in which women’s writing in the colonial period might demand **different** theoretical tools to those developed within colonial **discourse**. Claiming to be the first book **that** sets women travellers within the colonial context, **she** contends that women’s works **were** informed by different discursive frameworks and pressures which she maps out subsequently in her discussion.

⁴¹ Marie Louise Pratt, “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen”, *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, vol 12, no. 1, 1985, p. 126

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Her thesis argues that because of the way discourses of femininity were circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travellers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did. As a result, the writing which they produced tended to be more tentative than male writing, less able to assert the 'truths' about imperial rule without qualification. Because of their oppressive socialisation and marginal position in relation to imperialism, and despite their generally privileged class position, women writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about the race as a whole. Mills says that it is in their struggle with the discourses of imperialism and femininity, and which pulled them in different textual directions, that their writing exposes the unsteady foundations on which it is based.⁴³

My objective in selecting certain narratives written by women missionaries will be to show how women subscribed to the already existing world view about an 'inferior people'. They not only manifested the tensions implicit in encroaching on an essentially 'male' domain but also participated in the dominant framework of colonialism, though this was done through negotiating with the framework of femininity. The unique aspect of accounts written by missionary women is their borrowings from the repertoire of colonialism while seemingly working for the 'upliftment of downtrodden souls'. Missionary women's writings differ from the other accounts on the fact that while the latter struggles within the discourses of imperialism and femininity, the former struggles within the discourses of imperialism, femininity *and* the "evangelical mission".

Sara Mills challenges Edward Said's contention that Orientalism is peculiarly a male conception of the world. Going back to Said, he opines that "Orientalism itself...was an exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writings of travellers and novelists".⁴⁴ Women, instead, were usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy expressing unlimited sensuality. Mills deviates from Said's male view of imperialism since he ignores the fact that many women were actively involved in colonialism. She mentions that they wrote about the colonial situation and their works were widely read.

⁴³ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 19, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, n. 16, p. 207.

Mills addresses the issue of representations of **women**, saying that this has been **central to the** process of constructing a male national identity **in the colonial period**, but that **paradoxically** has been based on an excising of women's **involvement** in colonialism. By **stressing on the** importance of the issue of representation, **Mills shows** how the discourses of **women's role** within colonialism establish the parameters for **women's writing** about the colonised countries. Although women feature largely in the **colonial enterprise** as potent objects of **purity and** symbols of home, their writing is not taken **seriously** in the same way that **male orientalist** writing is. Given the quantity of writing **produced** by women during the colonial period, **their work** has been largely ignored.⁴⁵

My discussions are not based on an exhaustive **study of women's travel writing**, but a selection of particular texts which deserve in-depth **rereading** for the richness of their content. These women missionaries were not canonical travel **writings and their work** has been **largely ignored** in the revival of women's travel writing. What I **propose** to initiate in my discussions of their texts is to retrieve these "overlooked" narratives **and to accommodate** these texts into the **popular canons**, at the same time pointing out the unique **experiences** of these narratives.

Mills also traces the way in which the discursive **situation** determined women's travel **texts in the** colonial period. Constraints on the production of **the text** as well as constraints on their **reception** determined the contents of women's travel writing. **Taking a pointer from Mills here**, I have addressed the issue of constraints in the **missionary texts**, which includes their **reception** by a "Christian" readership. Texts were shaped and **written according** to the tastes and **demands** of a target-readership and hence missionary literature **provide a whole** fresh outlook on the **discourses** of the "heathen" when we consider the reading audience.

Locating my position within the theories discussed **above**, I have used three primary texts for this dissertation. In chapter 1, a reading of the papers **presented** in the Jubilee Conference of the Assam Mission, 1886 has been carried out. It is not a **re/reading** of *all* the papers presented in the conference, but a selection of some papers. This **chapter** aims to point out the **common** prejudices adhered to by colonial travelers, while at **the same time** looking at the missionaries' accounts as narratives by "colonial actors". A **re/reading** of the *Papers and Discussions of the*

⁴⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 19, pp. 57-58.

Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886 is attempted in this chapter with the purpose of pointing out the “othering” devices found in travel accounts, and placing the missionaries’ accounts in the same context.

The expansionist agenda of the Mission to conquer souls is comparable to the entire colonial endeavor of expansion and subjugation by replacing everything that is old and hence sinful with a new sinless present. Like in other travel accounts by colonial agents, the missionaries’ accounts looked at the natives as children and the mission postulated “neither masculinity nor femininity but infancy, a protosocial condition from which Christian manhood and womanhood are imagined to emerge”.⁴⁶ This “infantilization of the indigenous people” was a particular approach taken up by travel writers while interacting with the natives and the missionaries were no exceptions to the rule. This chapter will also identify the contribution of missionary accounts to the construction of the “native” identity.

Chapter 2 will continue to view the missionaries as part of the colonial project, taking into account the role played by the missionary wives in the colonial enterprise and how they negotiated with the ongoing male discourse in their narration. In this chapter Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India* will be re/read as the core text, locating it within the conventions of women’s travel writing in the nineteenth century.

A Corner in India sheds a new perspective to the existing views of adventure narrative in the feminist criticism of travel writing. The adventure narrative as one of the conventions of travel writing was appropriated by women writers in the plot form, but it was mostly with a degree of uneasiness because the adventuring hero role clashed with other discursive constructions of how women behave. It is interesting to look at how Mary Mead Clark negotiates with the adventure narrative, at the same time positioning herself as the narrative voice while foregrounding the figure of her husband as the adventure hero.

This chapter will also bring into focus the production of missionary texts as determined by a number of complex factors. Mary Mead Clark’s text serves as an exceptional instance of how texts were determined by the demand of readership, at the same time highlighting the interest of the “Christian”

⁴⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, London: Polity, 1994, p. 133.

world in reading about the “heathen” populations.

Chapter 3 is an evaluation and a re/reading of *The Star of the Naga Hills*, a collection of letters written by Rev. Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg, missionaries to the Naga Hills in Assam to their family and friends at home. Their letters bear testimony to the hard lives of the pioneering missionaries in Kohima among the Angami Nagas, evangelising the natives with the Bible and western medical skills.

These letters are indicators of the colonial spirit of the times they lived in, and also speak about personal loss and sacrifice suffered by the missionaries in an alien location. It is not possible to evaluate the letters together, as the experience articulated by them varies on the very fact that these are separate experiences of husband and wife, male and female. Thus the chapter will regard the letters as two set of experiences, and will re/read them separately as two distinct sets of letters.

The dissertation, then, will attempt to serve as a useful entry point to the retrieval and reevaluation /study of travel writing about the north east during the colonial period, especially those by missionaries.

Chapter 1

Travel Writing and the Missionaries in Assam: The Early Years

CHAPTER 1

Travel Writing and the Missionaries in Assam: The Early Years

The area encompassing the entire region of North East India today was governed by the Imperial power as a single province of Assam. The missionary Rev. P.H. Moore in 1886 in his "General View of Assam" recorded:

Assam is one of the twelve principal divisions into which India is divided for convenience of administration. Among these it ranks tenth in extent of territory and eleventh in number of population. But its location at the very north-east of the Indian Empire, bringing it into relation with border tribes, and also promising a way into Tibet and Western China, lends it a degree of importance more than commensurate with its relative size¹

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Already laid waste by insurrections and civil wars, the ruin of Assam was complete during the repeated invasions of the Burmese; the latter inaugurated a reign of terror, during which plunder, devastation, murder and desecration were the order of the day.² At the hour of the worst peril, the British had emerged as the deliverer of the people of Assam.³ The authorities of the East-India Company, both in England and India, had already interested themselves in the commercial possibilities of the North-East Frontier. On the representation made by some merchant adventurers, in September 1785, the Court had expressed a desire to extend the Company's salt-trade into the neighboring kingdom of Assam and two years later on their advice the Governor-General in Council had appointed one Huge Baillie as the Superintendent of the Assam-trade at Gowalpara.⁴

The devastation and the wholesale depopulation during the period of civil wars and invasions left vast tracts of wastelands throughout the province. The local authorities were alive from the very beginning to the fact that unless these lands were reoccupied and brought under tillage, neither the revenues of the government nor the resources of the people could be improved.⁵ To encourage foreign entrepreneurs, in 1857 the Court of Directors desired that wastelands should be granted in perpetuity to any person of 'substance and respectability' on condition that the applicant

¹ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, Guwahati: Spectrum, Rpt 1992, p. 1.

² H.K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company (1826-1858)*, Guwahati: Spectrum, 1980, p. 10.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 234.



possesses certain amount of capital for cultivation.⁶ With the appointment of the Tea-Committee in early 1834, attention was drawn towards Upper Assam when they learnt from the commissioner that the very plant which they were taking so much pain to naturalise was already growing wild nearabout Sadiya.⁷ The Tea-Committee could generate so much profit from the industry in Assam that in the report compiled by Rev. P. H. Moore during the Jubilee conference of 1886, he stated:

It will be seen that cotton goods, metals and grains take the lead among the Imports; and that tea is by far ahead among exports, and is alone more than the whole import trade. Tea is in fact the one industry that gives Assam any commercial importance, and the fact that it is almost exclusively in the hands of foreigners (Europeans) is not flattering to the mercantile instincts and ability of the native population.⁸

TABLE 1: Administration Report for 1885-86

Articles	Imports Rs	Exports Rs
Coal	141,202	70,590
Raw Cotton	1,674	257,569
Cotton Goods	7,370,868	800
Drugs and Chemicals	126,120	2,300
Dyes and Tans	88,324	3,262
Grains (Rice, & c)	3,125,325	3,848,520
Hides and Skins	2,560	506,824
Jute (raw)	5,287	533,087
Liquors	1,201,056	420
Metals (Brass, Iron, & c)	3,702,307	59,613
Oils (Kerosene and Others)	1,518,611	3,964
Oil- Seeds	32,503	2,657,133
Opium	395,850	---
Provisions	767,783	843,986
Salt	1,653,139	1,345
Silk (Raw, Indian)	4,800	154,800
Silk (Piece-goods)	54,825	---
Spices	1,149,550	34,899
Sugar	1,734,378	299
Stone and Lime	76,785	850,453

⁶ Ibid., p. 238.

⁷ Ibid., p. 241.

⁸ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 9.

Timber	50,759	1,090,595
Tobacco	1,092,710	2,607
Woolen piece-Goods	144,125	---
Tea	350,	30,238,450

Source: Rev. P.H. Moore, "General View of Assam", *The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union: Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, (Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Nowgong) p.9.

A further significant development was all set to take place in the North-east of India, For along with the interest generated in its erstwhile 'wastelands' another group of colonial agents were all set to make its foray to the region. These were the groups of missionaries, from varying and often opposing denominations, vying with one another to win adherents for the heavenly kingdom. Till the beginning of the nineteenth century Christian missionaries were discouraged by the English East India Company since it feared that proselytizing work could create tensions within the indigenous society which would go against its economic interests. But following the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833, the officials in North-East India started welcoming the missionaries, often with financial inducement. The American Baptists, for example, became particularly active in the Naga Hills from 1876 onwards.⁹

It maybe noted at the very outset that Assam and its hill districts, including the Naga Hills, were never the desired location of the American Baptist missionaries to carry out their evangelical campaign. Rev. P. H. Moore in his "General View of Assam" opined thus:

The American Baptist Missionary Union occupied Assam in 1836 simply as a step towards entering China from the west. God turned us back, and has kept us here now fifty years. Was it because He saw that it was necessary that we first evangelize this valley and surrounding hills as a base of supply for more extended operations in the regions beyond, which are still an unknown quantity in all our Geographies, both physical and moral?¹⁰

Their ambition to venture out beyond the border never materialized and the missionaries stayed back in Assam, spreading out to the hill districts to establish in the tribal areas "one of the large movements to Christianity in Asia"¹¹ However the expansionist motive of the missionaries, though hampered "from entering China"¹² was undeterred nonetheless and they still continued to

⁹ Richard. M. Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among Nagas 1876-1971", *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XX1, no. 1, Jan-Mar 1984, p. 7.

¹⁰ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 18.

¹¹ Richard. M. Eaton, "Conversion to Christianity Among Nagas 1876-1971", n. 9, p. 7.

¹² *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 18.

harbor ambitions of reaching out to the unministered lands beyond Assam. Rev. E. W. Clark in "Gospel Destitution about Assam" enthusiastically talks about the possibility of a telegraph line from Kohima in the Naga hills through the Angami Naga country across Manipur and down the Chindwin valley in Burma, to Ava or Mandalay:

The maintaining of a telegraph line from Assam to Burma by this route means that along it a fair degree of order will be established. Hence, in the near future, our missionaries of Assam and Burma may be expected to be shaking hands along this line. In fact, so far as the hill work is concerned, Upper Assam is an extension of Upper Burma. How long will it take our people in America to understand this?¹³

The very fact that the missionary movement in the North-East sounded out far reaching changes in every aspect of the natives' lives needs to be seriously explored. By placing the narratives produced by the missionaries, roughly spanning the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the area of travel narratives, throw up many implications which demand a re/reading of these accounts. A necessity to question the representations and shaping of the native identity is especially important and more so at the present time, for the literature and history about the North-East of India remains shrouded in a mist of obscurity. A study of the contemporary accounts being written at the time palpably illustrate that the North-East was a hot-bed of evangelical and imperial activities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and may be able to supply an explanation for the isolated position that the region adopts in its relation with the rest of India. At this juncture the missionaries' accounts provide valuable commentaries about the colonial enterprise because the natives were silenced by their lack of a written history and literature. The bulk of their writings can be helpful in locating the tribals of the hill districts of Assam in the entire colonial enterprise.

Travel narratives in the post colonial context often become sites for the collision and contestation of cultures. Sponsored or institution backed travel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, even when carried out under the guise of a more honorific study and research usually concealed a set of aims, objectives and agendas ulterior in motive. The entire enterprise of such colonial meaning-making has thus become a subject of critical investigation. As it is, in studying travel literature within the academia today the question of motive is analyzed critically. At this point, we must interrogate ourselves whether we would be committing a serious error by

¹³ Ibid., p. 225.

ignoring the issue of motive or by treating it as completely suspect.¹⁴ However it certainly cannot be denied that there is a direct link between travel writing/writers and the history of colonization and imperialism where these accounts tell us how a superior culture constructs its image of other cultures. Travel narratives produced “the rest of the world” for European readerships but only at a level that would confirm the superiority of their own culture.¹⁵ Writers of travel accounts wrote on the supposition that the natives were unable or unqualified to represent themselves, thus they must be represented by those more ‘reliable’ sources.¹⁶

Edward Said’s basic thesis argues that western writers, especially from the eighteenth century, have constructed the orient as the other, and has, in doing so, attempted to contain and make powerless the inhabitants of colonized countries by fixing them in an object position and hence retaining a powerful position for westerners.¹⁷ Contrary to the popular western discourses, the missionary travel accounts claim to be free from the openly racist discourses often found in other travel narratives, their only objective being to understand and explain the godless natives to a civilized western audience without any bias. Such claims have serious implications when we view missionary accounts in the same vein of travel literatures circulating at the time. For instance, the American missionaries proselytizing in the Naga Hills represented to the natives British colonial power. They were seen as agents of the Raj, and a study of their literature betrays certain stereotyping devices employed by colonial agents. To quote Nicholas Thomas,

Colonial culture thus includes not only official reports and texts related directly to the process of governing colonies and extracting wealth, but also a variety of travelers’ accounts, representations produced by other colonial actors such as missionaries and collectors of ethnographic specimens...¹⁸

He goes on to say that individual missionaries especially from the mid-nineteenth century on often wrote for geographical and anthropological audiences as well, and were thus suspect authors whose practical reactions and actions in the field reflected a range of assumptions and influences.¹⁹

¹⁴ Sachidananda Mohanty, ed., *Travel Writing and the Empire*, New Delhi: Katha, 2003, pp. xiii-xiv.

¹⁵ Judy Mabro, *Veiled Half-Truth: Western Traveller’s Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*, New York: I. B. Travis and Co Ltd, 1996, p. 3.

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin 1995, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, London: Polity, 1994, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

This chapter aims to point out the common **prejudices** adhered to by colonial travelers, while at the same time looking at the missionaries' **accounts** as narratives by "colonial actors".²⁰ A re/reading of the *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886* is attempted in this chapter with the **purpose** of pointing out the "othering" devices found in travel accounts, and placing the **missionaries'** accounts in the same context. This chapter will also trace the implications of such **accounts** on the construction of the **Naga identity** through such texts.

Evangelizing and Educating: An "Imperial Responsibility"

In producing accounts of the **Naga Hills and its inhabitants**, the missionary was the quintessential traveler par excellence armed with a **notebook**, pen, a little knowledge of medicine and "the Good Book". The hills inhabited by **the tribals** provided a perfect **setting** for the missionaries, enabling them to channel their **proselytizing** elsewhere even though they could not realize their initial project of reaching out to **Tibet and China**, which were already **strongholds** of Buddhism. The main interest of the imperial **government** in Christian missions in the North East related to their work among the hill tribes, since **support** of Christianity in those regions was not likely to lead to public disturbances of the kind **that** took place among Hindus and Muslims in response to missionary work. The principal **area in which** government and missions found that they could be of mutual benefit was education. **Though** the government was in theory committed to providing education for its subjects (especially **after** Wood's dispatch of 1854) it **wanted** to keep the expenditure for the administration of the **hills** to a minimum, consistent only with the need to maintain law and order²¹. The so called **imperial** responsibility acted as an onus on the missionaries, charging them to uplift the heathenish, **savage** and backward natives. **Christianity** was, in their terms, the only way to civilization and **this** could take place among the natives only by totally renouncing all native customs and **traditions** and embracing a western mode of life. A two-fold missionary aim was revealed, firstly the **conversion** of the natives to Christianity and secondly to educate them on western lines. In his **paper** the Rev E.G Philips declared that:

Among a tribe of savages, step by step with the entrance of Christianity there must be done a large amount of literary work. The Bible must be translated and a **Christian** literature must be given to them.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

²² *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n. 1, p. 74.

Like the attitude of all colonial agents towards natives, the missionaries assumed the role of superior adult individuals since the natives, in their opinions, were too immature to act independently for their own good. For them, any level of literacy that would enable the natives to read the bible and sing hymns was good enough education. The natives were viewed as *Tabula Rasa*, an empty space for which the missionaries appointed themselves to fill up. Further on in the paper, one cannot fail to miss out the colonial stance that the missionary takes on:

The people are savages, so the work in every respect is pioneer work. But savages and demon-worshippers have their redeeming features, when viewed from a missionary standpoint. They are virgin soil, not waste land, full of the roots and seeds of Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Mohammedanism, land which must be first cleared, and in which you will expect to see the evil plants constantly re-appearing. Sow the true seed abundantly and prayerfully, and expect without fail to reap abundantly and speedily²³

By appointing themselves as “pioneers” while endowing the “savages” with everything that is “evil”, describing the natives as “virgin soil” and by invoking the imagery of sowing and reaping, the missionary is indeed the all-powerful colonial agent in front of whom the natives are defenseless and rendered immobile like a plot of land waiting to be cultivated.

The classroom was considered as the most suitable place to tame the wild heathens. Infact, education and evangelization were almost synonymous activities and one act presupposed the other. In his paper, the Rev C.E Burdette opined that:

“It is an advantage for the missionary to offset his general unpopularity by the respectable title of teacher. It is an advantage to have access to the minds of heathen, old or young, while in the receptive, trustful attitude of a school”.²⁴

The confines of the classroom as a setting for receiving knowledge were manipulated by the missionary teacher. It appeared to serve as a place where knowledge would be freely imparted while at the same time looking for “access to the minds” of the natives.

Most of the missionaries subscribed to the belief that if the natives were to be educated at all, a secular mode of education should be avoided as far as possible. For them, secular education was not the right medium to mould a person’s character, especially that of a savage. There always

²³ Ibid., p. 78.

²⁴ Ibid., p.167.

lurked a fear that mission schools established as imparters of religious education would be ousted by secular schools:

It is worth noticing that, if the Christian missionary withdraws from secular school-work, children and youth are left in the hands of non-religious, heathen, or irreligious teachers. In many countries there are already secular schools; by the time a missionary is ready to abandon school-work in any country, government schools will be established in their place. It would be strange if heathen schools should prove suitable coadjutors in mission work".²⁵

Education as imparted by the missionaries through their mission schools, while managing to educate the native to some extent, was calculated solely on evangelizing the natives since the curriculum was loaded in favour of religion. The missionaries felt that a school that was run on the dictates of Christian values was most equipped to tame the natives and there was always a tendency to discourage secular education. After equipping themselves with some semblance of literacy, the only options for the natives were to work as assistants to the missionaries and pastors since they did not have the necessary qualifications to compete in other fields. Thus the options available to them were very narrow. Just how strongly the missionaries were determined in their efforts to ensure that the natives receive education in the confines of the classroom can be seen in an excerpt from "The Claims and Conduct of Mission Schools" presented by Rev. C. E. Burdette:

It seems best, therefore, as soon as the pupil is able to take up memory studies and logical exercises, to introduce scripture studies into the course. A marked distinction between the two parts of the course should be avoided as far as possible, but good attention to the scripture lessons must be strictly required.²⁶

It would be important to inquire at this point why the Protestant missions placed such emphasis upon creating a written language. It was always the first work done by a missionary moving into new linguistic areas. One of the characteristic emphases of Protestantism from its beginnings in the 16th century had been the use of the mother tongue in both worship and reading of the Bible. The Bible had to be made accessible in the language of the people and in instances where there was no written language, a new one was created.²⁷ For instance in the essay "Historical Sketch of the Lhota Naga Field" by Rev. W. E. Witter:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 177-78.

²⁷ Frederick. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992, pp. 191-92.

August 25th, a day school was opened with three Naga boys who were employed as servants in the family. The number of pupils subsequently increased to seven, all of whom earned their living in the service either of Government officials or the missionary. The daily sessions were from an hour to an hour to an half, a part of which time was spent in Bible instruction, and a part in teaching the boys to read and write their own language, the Roman character having been adopted. The First Catechism in Assamese, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer, was translated into Lhota and a good share of it committed to memory by the school boys.²⁸

Further on, Rev. C. E. Burdette in his presentation "Claims and Conducts of Mission Schools" also endorses the same opinion:

It is quite indispensable that the people should hear in their own tongue the wonderful works of God and, therefore, that portions of the Scripture should be issued in every considerable, and considerably distinct dialect.²⁹

Such a flawed system of education was bound to have serious repercussions on the natives since the entire process of education simply meant Christianizing oneself. This system of teaching was also for the benefit of the non-converts, who were made to study the scriptures along with the other subjects being taught. The Mission was therefore resolute to act as the harbinger of civilization for the natives, and Christianity was the only door through which they could gain access to the western civilized world.

Christianised natives/hybridized "other(s)"

In the entire process of deconstructing the native's overall identity, the missionaries as travel writers ruthlessly assumed the authority of representing the natives at the same time showing the inability or incompetence of the natives to represent themselves. Encounters with different lands, peoples, races, their habitats and customs, stimulated the natural inclination towards observing, questioning and deducing, that was to provide the framework, important elements, and tendencies that constitute an authoritative Western discourse on Eastern lands.³⁰ With the assumption of this authority it was possible for statements to be made about 'the' Oriental mind, Oriental manners, personality, and so on; a field was defined through which societies, people and events were represented, not on the basis of their own statements, but by European experts, whose writing presumed the silence and absence of Orientals themselves.³¹

²⁸ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 92

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁰ Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", in Sachidananda Mohanty, ed., *Travel Writing and Colonialism*, New Delhi: Prestige, 2003, p. 36.

³¹ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, n. 18, p. 23.

Analyzed from this viewpoint, the authorial position of the missionaries in representing the natives has several implications. For instance, how does one represent another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?³² This holds true for the accounts of the missionaries when we look at their writings. The unchristianised native was a fearful and evil figure against whom the missionaries had to protect themselves at all times. Their manner of living, the food they ate and the rituals they observed were abhorrent and godless, evoking only horror and loathing. But the contempt they felt for the past heathen natives came to be replaced by a parental mantle of care and concern for the new converts. Now the happy Christian natives, almost childlike in their newfound religion and identities could be contrasted with the wild, uncouth and savage non-Christian. This contrast was useful for it could be exemplified as a discourse upholding the Mission's endeavors at the same time showcasing the successful upliftment of the miserable conditions of the natives by Christianity.

A usual response among the so-called civilizers was the arrogance with which they callously dismissed the "other's" language and religion. As a result, the judgment passed by the missionaries has proved to be fatal for the construction of the tribal image and identity. Dr. Tuisem Shishak, a Naga scholar laments this predicament of the Nagas and his attitude is a typical reaction of the Naga intelligentsia in post-independence India:

...what has been happening to all these Naga virtues since they came in contact with westerners in the 1830's? This contact brought many breaks in indigenous Naga practices. Old customs and traditions were rapidly forsaken or modified beyond recognition, and old beliefs which for ages had been firmly held were quietly dropped, partly because they met with contempt and ridicule from missionaries, and partly because the young men soon learned that they were not worthy of credence. The Christian population grew steadily, and the spirit of change invaded and pervaded every aspect of village life.³³

The methods engaged by the Mission to evangelize and civilize the natives were aimed at imposing on them an entirely different identity, far removed from their native identities. Eventually these acts came to be greeted with different responses by the other colonial agents. With respect to the anthropologists, there was a clash of vested interests with the missionaries. The anthropologists were interested in preserving and studying the customs and traditions of the

³² Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, n. 16, pp. 25-26.

³³ Tuisem Shishak, "Nagas and Education", in *Nagas at Work*, New Delhi: NSUD Publication, 1996, p. 26.

tribals whereas the missionaries wanted to do away completely with the old way of life. For the anthropologists, these tribals with their lives unaffected by any tinge of civilization provided untold possibilities for their research and publications. On the other hand the missionaries looked down on anything slightly reminiscent of “savagery” and “godlessness”, and their aim was to gain as much servants for the Heavenly Master. J.H. Hutton, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills (1917-1935) wrote:

With the Ao’s and Lhotas matters have gone even further. Old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten, the number of Christians or quasi-Christians is steadily increasing, and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life.³⁴

The note of disapproval in the above passage cannot be ignored and it is indeed expected for Hutton not only was an administrator but was an anthropologist as well. This passage is clearly the anthropologist opining about the activities of the missionaries. Another anthropologist of repute, J.P. Mills has a similar take on the issue. Talking about the Ao Nagas, he writes:

The teaching of the American Baptist Mission has made great progress in this group. Old customs are fast being abandoned and it is considered rather improper to relate old traditions, even if they are not forgotten.³⁵

Here, an issue of identity is being questioned by the anthropologist, himself a colonial actor in the whole scheme of things. To quote further:

Of the mistakes made by the mission the gravest, in my opinion, and the one most fraught with danger for the future is their policy of strenuously imposing an alien western culture on their converts.³⁶

The converts become different entities altogether, no longer allowed by the church to don their ornamental fineries, their traditional clothing and they are exempted from singing their folksongs and participating in any kind of native festivals. Even the way they wore their hairstyles were dictated by the Mission. Such was the state of affairs that their natural spontaneity was almost extinguished. It is interesting to note that:

A curious thing I have frequently noticed is that Christians tend to lose their sense of humour. They take themselves very seriously and are apt to go about with long faces.³⁷

³⁴ J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. vii.

³⁵ J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 420

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

The activities of the missionaries were under **fire and** criticized not only by the **anthropologist** but by the sociologist as well:

Familiarity with Missionary attitudes and **practices** which are all too characteristic makes **inevitable** the conclusion that there is entirely too much **negation, too much taboo** and too little that is **positive**. There is grave danger that Christianity, as presented to **these people**, come to be little more than the **adoption** of another set of taboos, and taboo is no new element **in the life** of any group on a low cultural level.³⁸

The missionaries in the Naga Hills created **miniaturized** colonies wherever they set up their missions, erasing and invalidating entire histories **and traditions**. The remark made by Rev. P. H. Moore in his paper "General view of Assam" **about** the history of the people is **note-worthy**. According to him:

There is no book which pretends to give a **history of Assam**. The record of events **during the past one hundred years** is fairly well-known, but one, **tracing back** the thread of history prior to the **nineteenth century**, advances into ever deepening obscurity.³⁹

Rev. P. H. Moore while describing the peoples **inhabiting** the province of Assam, **centers on the Hill Man** in the following passage quoted below:

Passing on we find a man whose sturdy limbs give **proof of mountain climbing**. His prominent **cheek-bones** and slightly Mongolian cast of features at once **mark him as different** from the Assamese. I tell you **he is a Hill Man**. But can you tell me what demon he **worships? That buffalo, pig or goat that he killed yesterday** with so many incantations, calling loud and long on **the name** of his god...⁴⁰

The callous rejection of the native social and **religious** system by the American Baptist missionaries in their intensity to create a new **social order** among the hills people resulted in, according to Henry Balfour writing the foreword in *The Ao Nagas*, "the decay of old **customs**" and "loss of pride and interest in themselves and **their past traditions**"⁴¹ thereby showing their histories and identities as worthless and inferior.

In his report, "Historical Sketch of the Angami Naga Mission", Rev. S.W. Rivenburg declared that "They are without books or a written language, and by religion belong to the demon

³⁸ William Carlson Smith, *The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam. A Study in Ethnology and Sociology*, London: Macmillan and Co, 1925, p. 185.

³⁹ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p 16.

⁴¹ J. P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, n. 35, p. xxii.

worshippers”.⁴²

Such was the attitude adopted by the missionaries toward the natives, dismissing their religion and customs thereby condemning their very identities and imposing an entirely alien set of customs for them along with a new religion. Hence colonial discourse could compare the appearance of the native, who might be an acculturated Christian, with his savage or cannibal essence; discrepancies did not establish that the European construct of the native’s nature might be false, but that his hybridized being was somehow inauthentic.⁴³

This recalls Homi Bhabha’s critique on colonial mimicry, which is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. He says that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. It is from the area between mimicry and mockery where the reforming, civilising mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.⁴⁴ Missionary educationists sought to educate the natives to produce mimic western replicas, who were almost the same like them but not quite the same. The natives in this predicament suffered what I should call the “hangovers of civilisation”, not exulting but confused in their new hybridized beings.

The American Baptists: Hyphenated White Men?

The American Baptist missionaries were “hyphenated” white men by dint of being “Anglo-Americans”, who, according to Marie Louise Pratt “are principal architects of the often imperialist internal critique of empire”⁴⁵ but this idea remains debatable within the critique of the imperialist framework today. David Zou has noted that the missionary discourse sometimes critiqued the dominant discourse of the empire as if located outside it, especially by refusing to ignore the *colonial guilt* that haunts colonials even at the peak of their power and prestige.⁴⁶ This particular attitude is apparent in Rev M. C. Mason’s presentation during the conference of 1886:

⁴² *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 85.

⁴³ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, n.18, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”, in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 86.

⁴⁵ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 213.

⁴⁶ David Zou Vumlallian, “Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on Northeast India” *Religion and Society*, vol. 48, no. 2, June 2003, p. 59.

We are Europeans, and cannot change the fact. **But we cannot** be one with the Europeans in their vices... To what extent should we separate ourselves from **the Europeans** of the country; to what extent should we bring ourselves down to the ways of the natives, **are often perplexing questions.**⁴⁷

The Mission criticized the Europeans in so far as **they** proved to be a stumbling block for their interests. One main reason was the behavior of **the European** soldiers towards the native women. In *The Star of the Naga Hills*, Sidney Rivenburg's young wife Hattie mentions in a letter to her parents in America the immoral conduct of the **European** soldiers with the native women:

Most of the ranking officers in India are the **younger sons** of the English nobility...when the **husbands** are here alone, they all too often take native women. **This results** in the serious Eurasian problem, a **problem** which is undoubtedly one of the greatest obstacles **to the spread** of Christianity with which **the missionary** has to deal⁴⁸

However, the missionaries along with the colonial **guilt** carried with them the **imperial pride** which is so prevalent among colonizers while **interacting** in the colony. There was no **doubt** in their minds that Assam's success in its trades, **namely the Tea** trade was achieved because of the imperial agents. Rev. P. H. Moore in assessing **the empire's** contribution to the **betterment** of Assam's Tea trade in his report "A General View of Assam" negligently **overlooked** the exploitation of the native laborers by the **Company** and was blatantly supportive of the **whole** venture of exploitation and monopoly carried **out** by the imperial agents. Clearly, the missionaries empathized more with the **Europeans** with whom they felt a closer **bond** than the **savages** they were trying to civilize. The **business acumen** of the Europeans in **saving the** hinterlands of Assam from becoming a wasteland was indeed to be lauded, opined Rev. P. H. Moore, since only an *advanced* and *civilized* nation **like** Britain could invest in these **wastelands** with success:

The plant is indigenous in the land, but a **European** was the first to discover it and bring it to **public notice**, soon after Assam became British territory. **European capital** and enterprise nourished the **industry** in its infancy, have tided it over financial crashes, and **established** it on a permanent basis as the **great source** of wealth of the province.⁴⁹

In the same breath the Reverend talks of a "new Assam", as sung in the Jubilee hymn:

Our Jubilee hymn says "sin-free,--a new Assam by **faith** we see." It requires no prophetic vision to **say that**

⁴⁷ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 109.

⁴⁸ Narola Rivenburg, ed, *The Star of the Naga Hills*, Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1941, p. 82.

⁴⁹ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 9.

before that new Assam is realized, the regions beyond, and both north and south, will be beckoning us on to still larger victories.⁵⁰

The expansionist agenda of the Mission to conquer souls is comparable to the entire colonial endeavor of expansion and subjugation by replacing everything that is old and hence sinful with a new sinless present. In "Methods of Mission Work", Rev. M. C. Mason proposes a model for the "new" Assam, which would be built along the same lines as the Mission in North America:

As our Home Mission Society has for its motto "North America for Christ," let us, feeble though we be, have Assam, or if you please All Central Asia for Christ.⁵¹

An extract from the letter written by Rev. R. E. Neighbor, a former missionary of the Assam Mission, to the conference further expounds the ambitious expansionist objectives of the Mission:

The planting of the Cross for the first time in any part of the world is for that portion of the world the pivotal point in its history...it is an event which far eclipses in its significance any other event, and all others in its history.⁵²

Thus we have here a situation where a parallel empire is operating side by side with the English empire. But the aims and objectives of the Mission might have differed from that of the imperial administrators. A marked difference was that the administrators and planters aimed at limited ends such as order, taxation, profits, cheap labour, etc whereas the missionaries invariably aimed at overall change in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body.⁵³ Overall, while considering the relationship between the colonial agents *vis-à-vis* the missionaries and the administrators in the hills, it is clear that both could not have succeeded without the intervention of the other. Rev Sidney Rivenburg remarked in his report that:

The presence of a regiment of infantry and five hundred armed police indicated that the day of peace was at hand and of all points among the Nagas this appeared the most favourable for missionary labour.⁵⁴

Rev. W.E. Witter too noted in his paper "Historical Sketch of the Lhota Naga Mission":

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵² Ibid., p. 277.

⁵³ T.B. Beidelmam, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁴ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n. 1, p. 85.

The occupation of Kohima as the head quarters of **the English Government in the Naga hills, determined the settlement at that place of the missionary sent out in 1878 in response to Mr. Clark's request.**⁵⁵

By "Mr. Clark's request", Witter is talking about the conversation that took place between Clark, Moore and himself in 1885, and he cites a part of the exchange uttered by Clark:

If the Witters will occupy Wokha at once, I will give **the Missionary Union** a special gift of Rs.500 to cover the expense of their transfer, and I feel thoroughly **convinced** that such an act will meet with the **hearty consent of the brethren at Boston.**⁵⁶

The picture we get here shows the missionaries **working** in collaboration with the **empire and seeking protection under the banner of the empire. It has been observed that in the North East India there was extensive support for missionary work among government officials, particularly during the first thirty five years of British rule there and the missionaries of whatever denomination accepted that support gratefully.**⁵⁷ **Moreover the Mission was funded and under the control of the American Baptist Missionary Union in Boston and winning new converts meant pleasing the Heavenly Father as well as their earthly fathers in America.**

However it is clear that the Mission was also important **for the empire or its agents in the hills. In most cases the missionaries proved more effective than the army in calming the natives. A later commentator on the issue states:**

Much credit goes to the Christian missionaries who **have civilized** most of these tribes by their **heroic efforts. But while the general rule is that missionaries are followed by the armies and administrators, in case of these hills the reverse is true.**⁵⁸

Some administrators were openly supportive of the **Mission, and ensured them the protection of the government in their labours. In his letter to Charles. E. Trevelyan, Francis Jenkins the Chief Commissioner of Assam makes clear his stand on the evangelizing work among the tribals. Jenkins in his letter indicated that while he was mainly in favour of the educational work carried out by the missionaries, he certainly did not object if that work resulted in the conversion of the**

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

⁵⁷ Frederick. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, n. 27, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Birendra Chandra Chakravorty, *British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam Since 1854*, Calcutta: Firma Klm Pvt Ltd, 1981, p. 6.

people.⁵⁹ In an extract from the letter written by Rev. I. J. Stoddard to the Jubilee conference of 1886, he mentions:

Colonel Houghton was Commissioner of the Hill tribes when I was there. He was a devoted Christian and church-man; but was so delighted with the American Baptist method of teaching and preaching to savages, and their wonderful success, that he always advised Government to give those American missionaries an opening among all such tribes in preference to his own church missionaries. He was among the Karens before going to India. He paid his money freely to every mission enterprise. I hope you find as good men among Government officials as Colonel Houghton.⁶⁰

Another commentator on the missionaries' activities among the tribals wrote:

Given the large number of tribals that eventually became Christian it is sometimes assumed that Christianity was easily introduced and readily accepted among them. In fact, the initial opposition was often violent. The missionaries were dealing with a people given to blood feuds and almost constant warfare among themselves. But for the protection offered by the British government, the Christian movement in the northeastern hills would have a much longer list of martyrs than it has.⁶¹

Though opinions might differ on this issue, it is indeed true that both the missionaries as well as the armies were indispensable to each other and each contributed in attaching the turbulent hills to the empire, thereby making them a part of colonial history. Put in its simplest terms, the relationship between the missionaries and the government was "cooperation in certain limited areas of mutual coincidence of interests".⁶²

Master/Servant Narrative

Even while the evangelizing mission was going on, the missionaries remained consciously superior, distancing themselves from the natives. They saw themselves as "foreigners in the country"⁶³ who would be eventually going back to their own places. Their only duty during the entire span of their stay was to ensure a tribal Christian population in the hills as testimonies of their evangelical zeal. There was altogether no question of a relationship forged on mutual respect and equal footing. Rev. A.K. Gurney in his paper exhorted the missionaries to maintain an impersonal relationship with the natives:

⁵⁹ *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, Vol xvi, 1836, p. 67.

⁶⁰ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 266.

⁶¹ Frederick S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, n. 27, p. 73.

⁶² Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", n. 30, p. 35.

⁶³ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 118.

Our modes of life, habits and thought are different **from those** of the native Christian. There is a **great gulf** between them and us. Our position is much above **them**. We cannot bring ourselves down to **them** or lift them up to us...The missionary in education and **knowledge** is far above his native brother, and he **belongs** to the conquering race, the English and Americans **being all the same** to a native.⁶⁴

Like in other travel accounts by colonial agents, the **missionaries'** accounts looked at the **natives** as children whom they were entrusted with to **bring up in proper civilized behaviors**. The mission postulated neither masculinity nor femininity but **infancy**, a protosocial condition from **which** Christian manhood and womanhood are imagined to **emerge**.⁶⁵ This "infantilization of the indigenous people"⁶⁶ was a particular approach taken **up by** travel writers while interacting with the natives and the missionaries were no exceptions to **the rule**. The natives came to regard them as "fathers" looking up at them with awe and reverence **and any relationship between them, if it at all existed were one-sided**. By Imagining that **others were** part of a family, the mission was able to reconcile common human hierarchy in a **manner that** was as natural and intelligible in the short term as it was insecure in the long term: after **all, children** grow up. That is also **why this** metaphor was part of the common ground of colonial discourse, yet also a resource to be valorized in a specific way in evangelical propaganda.⁶⁷

The once proud and fierce warriors became subdued **and dominated** by a higher order, **and everything** they had been regarding as valiant and **glorious** was relegated to a lower order. Whatever things they had learnt and had practiced **before** was no longer proper to this **new** higher order and thus they entered into a state of un-learning and re-learning everything. In this state of affairs we experience the occurrence of "contact Zones", the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people's geographically **and** historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, **usually** involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict.⁶⁸ The fully grown native became a child/student of the missionary father/teacher, and for the missionary traveler as well as the native it necessarily created comparisons between 'self' and the 'other', concretising images of both.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 118-19.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, n.18, p. 133.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

⁶⁸ Marie Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, n.45, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Suchitra Sarma, "Perceiving the Land, Writing the Land: The Colonial Traveller's Gaze on India (1600-1875)", n. 30, p. 35.

The missionaries considered themselves with utmost certainty as the ones in charge as is evident from Rev. M.C. Mason's paper:

At times we must compel them to work, as the eagle compels its young to fly. It is easy to sail on a *saheb's* back; and many prefer this to walking. We must take ourselves from under such, and make them use their own power.⁷⁰

There is clearly a wide demarcation between "them" and "we", where the natives become the alien "them" and the missionaries are the "we", joining hands and wits together to guard against the native. Because of their attitudes of superiority towards the natives, they could not trust the natives to manage without them whereas in the long run this responsibility grew indeed to be a burden for the missionaries. They talked about the natives as irresponsible children while in the same breath cautioned each other against this very attitude because of the consequences this might cause later on:

Indeed if the missionary is not especially careful, and sometimes inspite of all they can do, the native Christians will depend on the missionary just as a lot of children do upon their parents, or like babes in arms, will scarcely be able to exist without the missionary.⁷¹

For the Mission an equal relationship with the natives based on mutual understanding and respect was not possible as the gulf which separated the civilizer with the *savage* was too vast to be bridged. A default "master-servant" partnership could only be forged if the natives (re)modeled themselves according to the terms dictated to them by the missionaries. There could be no relationship ultimately, because of the unyielding contempt that the missionaries had for everything "native", and also for their reluctance to understand the people they were dealing with. From the often quoted paper read by Rev. P.H. Moore during the Jubilee conference, we can distinguish the unambiguous disapproval that the missionaries had for the native religions and rituals:

It seems a hopeless task to try to give any other than the vaguest idea of the Religious condition of Assam...Indeed I doubt whether a whole volume of the most accurate description of the so-called religious beliefs and practices of the people of Assam, would not chiefly impress the reader with their monstrous and generally irreligious nature.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 104.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The missionary's tone here reflects the attitude assumed by any other colonizer, participating in the act of stereotyping anything that was new and unknown as "monstrous" and "irreligious" and combining all the unknown, strange qualities into one vague mass of darkness.

A marked change from the discourse of the missionaries is that of Verrier Elwin, another traveler in the North Eastern hill districts. Verrier Elwin at the outset of his travels was determined to improve the lot of the aboriginal people of India through evangelization and education but found himself captivated by the old and rich cultural values of Tribal India.⁷³ Elwin was against the assimilation of other cultures by the tribals. He argued for saving them from the inroads of civilization. He pleaded for allowing the aboriginals to live their lives in the way they knew best. Though he was initially a missionary himself, later he argued against Christian civilization as he found it destructive to primitive tribal life. He said that the aboriginals of India had their own life, their own form of art and culture, and their own religion, which was by no means to be despised.⁷⁴ As an example, he has commented on the 'melancholy' effect that forest reservation had on the tribals of Central India, for whom nothing aroused more resentment than the taking away of the forests which they regarded as 'their own property'.⁷⁵

But Elwin's attitude towards the tribals can be seen at best as an exercise at romanticizing the tribal culture and society. Anand Mahanand has observed that this act of romanticisation falls into the romantic framework of seeing the "other" as "exotic". It is argued that though he speaks about the humane, social and idyllic nature of tribal life, what is ambivalent about his narration is that, in many instances, he is more puzzled than convinced about his attitude toward tribal life. After all, his account is a transitional one because he is a missionary first, and then a traveler and ethnographer by way of living with the tribals.⁷⁶ Verrier Elwin, in spite of his close relationship with and sympathy for the tribals remained at best, as just another apologist of the colonial enterprise.

Whatever the nature of relationship that existed between the natives and the other colonial agents

⁷³ Anand Mahanand, "Ethnography as Travel: Verrier Elwin's Indian Journey", in Sachidananda Mohanty, ed., *Travel Writing and the Empire*, New Delhi: Katha, 2003, p. 142.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁷⁵ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, Rpt 1994, p. 57. Also See Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, New Delhi: 1960.

⁷⁶ Anand Mahanand, "Ethnography as Travel: Verrier Elwin's Indian Journey", n. 73, pp. 148-49.

was clearly inadequate for the colonizers to accept the natives as their equals. It was not possible to for the two entities to “just connect” as the ideal relationship prescribed by E. M. Forster.⁷⁷ The colonizers saw themselves as always changing, always moving and progressing whereas the natives were seen as fixed objects. In the colonial mind, the spaces occupied by the natives emerged as the symbol of conquest, an empty space for occupation, an ideal which activated a systematic exploitation of a domain in which the colonized was completely ‘absent’ or assumed ‘the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of western percipients’.⁷⁸ Such a ‘paradigmatic fossilization’ of difference created ‘deserts’ for colonial exploration and legitimized the exploration of these ‘empty’ spaces.⁷⁹ When and if at all the natives changed, it was a metamorphosis to a Christian status in which they were no longer loathsome and fearful but harmless and helpless like infants. They nurtured a “dependency complex” in the natives making them weak, vulnerable, childlike and hence dependent upon the strong, dependable westerner.⁸⁰

The missionaries’ role in nurturing the dependency complex in the natives recalls the covenant of the traditional chiefdoms and monarchies between the ruler and the ruled. The only difference being that, the converted natives did not resort to the customary rebellion in tribal society which was a form of social protest. Instead, they submitted to the covenant between high and low, or patron and client, which, according to Guha, was normally couched in the idiom of father and son.⁸¹

A Miniature New England

A close parallel can be drawn between the literary endeavors of the Puritan fathers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and the American Baptist missionaries in the Naga Hills or for that matter, the missionaries in the entire province of Assam. The first book in English to be printed in America was *The Whole Book of Psalms Faithfully Translated into English Meter*, commonly known as *The Bay Psalm Book*. It was brought out in 1640 as an expression of Puritan devotion

⁷⁷ See E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1998.

⁷⁸ Edward Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered: Europe and its Others”, *Essex Sociology of Literature*, vol 1, Colchester : University of Essex, 1985, p. 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ See O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonialism*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1964.

⁸¹ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, n. 75, p. 90.

to the Bible and a belief in the need to adapt **the forms** of literature to the service of **religion**, submerging art in spiritual and social purpose.⁸² Likewise the first literary effort of the missionaries in the Naga Hills was the translation of **the Bible** in the native tongue. In the paper by Rev. S. W. Rivenburg, "Historical Sketch of the Ao Naga Field" he says:

In May, 1885, Rev. E. W Clark left Mulong for **America**, after a stay in Assam of seventeen years, nine of which were spent in the Naga Hills. During this **time the language** was mastered and written, a **dictionary** made, primer, catechism, Life of Joseph in a book of **116 pages**, a hymn book and **Matthew and John** were carried through the press, beside the ordinary work of **the missionary**.⁸³

Even after a time difference of nearly one hundred **and thirty six** years the American **Baptist** missionaries were following in the tradition of **the Puritans** of New England, **establishing** a tradition of schools and schoolbooks that celebrated **both** literacy and Protestant **dogma** in teaching "millions to read, and not one to sin".⁸⁴ In **both** settings, the Biblical Word was the **first** and only sample of literature made available to the **mass**.

When the Puritans settled in New England, they were **merely** starting anew in a **different land** while still continuing their tradition of Puritan history. On the other hand when the American Baptists started their mission in the Naga Hills, they **were denying** the natives a right to **their own** history by erasing the natives' histories and imposing a **completely alien** tradition on them. The once proud and spontaneous animists found themselves **being modeled** on the strict Puritan lines of the Christian religion, imposing values on them for **which** they had no pressing requirement. The missionaries worked among the natives for a **picture-perfect** reproduction of their homeland, a miniature New England, thus implying nostalgia for **the home** they had left behind at the **same** time assuming the God-like authority of creation.

⁸² Paul Lauter and Richard Yarborough, eds., *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, Houghton Mifflin College Div, 1998, p. 84.

⁸³ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n.1, p. 83.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Chapter 2

Revisiting Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India* Through the Female Gaze

CHAPTER 2

Revisiting Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India* through the Female Gaze

This chapter will continue to view the missionaries as part of the colonial project, taking into account the role played by the missionary wives in the whole scheme of things and how they negotiated with the ongoing male discourse in their narration. For this purpose Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India* will be analysed as the core text while at the same time locating it in the conventions of women's travel writing in the nineteenth century.

When the restrictive policy of the British East India Company was lifted in 1833, there was an onslaught of foreign missions to India, witnessing a continual flow of protestant missionaries such as the English, Dutch, German, and other Europeans and then, increasingly, North American.¹ The American Baptist Missionary Union occupied Assam in 1836 and subsequently carried out wide-scale conversions in the hill districts of Assam. Mani Chawla Singh observes that the Protestant denominations at this time encouraged their missionaries to proceed to their appointed stations as married men and she exemplifies the case of James Thoburn, later bishop of the Methodist Missions in India. When Thoburn applied to become a missionary to India in 1859, the corresponding secretary had asked for six married men. A man without a wife was not what they expected as an "ideal" overseas missionary and James Thoburn recalled his discomfiture on discovering that his appointment was "a matter of regret and that had all the facts of the case been known ten days earlier, my commission would have been cancelled."² Thus many marriages were performed just before missionaries embarked on their journeys and as a result many missionary wives proceeding to India or China were often young brides, sometimes much younger than their husbands with little or no travel experience.³

Pioneering Travellers of a New Enterprise

Mary Mead Clark sailed from Boston to India aboard the "Pearl," a trading vessel of

¹ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000, pp. 42-43.

² Rev. J. M. Thoburn, *My Missionary Apprenticeship*, New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886, p. 25.

³ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 1, p. 84.

three hundred tons burden, bound for Calcutta via the Cape of Good Hope. In her own words:

During our voyage of one hundred and sixty days we put into no ports, sighted no land, were indeed prisoners on the deep, subject to the storms and hardships incident to a winter on board a small trading vessel. For hardtack and bacon, plum duff and salt junk, "lights and sounds," we lost our relish. The water, shipped to Boston for the voyage, grew thick, then grew thin, and oh, the odor! "Too scrupulous," the sailors said when we refused to drink it, but joyfully reveled with us in occasional fresh draughts from the clouds.⁴

It was a long and uncomfortable journey, and sometimes they found themselves fearing for their lives from the storms at sea:

When our little cockle-shell habitation was tossed like a football by angry waves, dashing and breaking and flooding the decks, while mingled with their roar and dash we heard the dragging of ropes and captain Harding's command, "Close reef sail, stand by the main halyards," we were in no mood to write of the awful grandeur of a storm at sea. We could do that better later with a steadier hand.⁵

The Pearl reached "far India's shores" finally and like all transit passengers at the time, they spent a few days sight-seeing and shopping in Calcutta before boarding a "snail-like traffic steamer for the long, tedious journey up the turbid waters of the crooked, winding Brahmaputra," taking fourteen days to reach Assam.⁶

Mary Clark was accompanying her husband E. W. Clark to take up an appointment as superintendent of the American Baptist Mission Press in Sibsagar, Assam, and also "to relieve temporarily in general mission work Rev. W. Ward, D.D., then about to take a much-needed furlough in America."⁷ The arrival of the Clark's in Assam would have a far-reaching impact on the Naga Hills, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Throughout the text we come across descriptions of physical hardships encountered during the journey. For Mary Mead Clark the voyage from Boston was in fact the beginning of numerous journeys to be undertaken. Life as a missionary's wife meant that she would be accompanying her husband in his Mission tours through the "untamed" jungles and terrains, and we find in her book accounts of many difficult journeys. After embarking from the steamer on crossing the

⁴ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, Rpt. 1978 (1st published in 1907), p. 6.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

Brahmaputra, the rest of the journey was a novel and fascinating experience for her, as she writes:

The next morning several miles by elephant through the jungle brought us to a point on the Dikho River where we found a native boat sent down by Doctor Ward, of Sibsagor. The trunks of two large trees dug out, supporting a bamboo platform, furnished a deck on which a miniature house for cabin was built of bamboo and canvas. Our motive power was natives, who, thrusting long bamboo poles into the bank, ran one after another the length of our deck. How wild, and strange, and fascinating withal that journey!⁸

Perhaps the journey up to the Naga Hills to join her husband in Mulong village, after a Baptist Mission was started there, was to be the most adventurous and novel expedition for Mary Clark. To go to the hills required a transportation of twenty-two miles from Sibsagar to Amguri, with the help of an elephant and bullock-carts.⁹ They continued their journey to the Naga Hills with the assistance of the “goods train,” natives who carried her in a basket on their backs.¹⁰

This was Mary Clark’s first foray into the hills and her words betray her consciousness of herself as a conqueror, a pioneer venturing triumphantly into undiscovered territory:

On and on we went, up and down the lower hills, crossing the mountain streams, through forests of stately trees with delicate creepers entwining their giant trunks, their branches gracefully festooned with vines, and orchids swaying in the breeze. 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.¹¹ (Emphasis mine)

She goes on in the same note in the next paragraph too:

Frequent and numerous traces of wild elephants, tigers, and bears, and the chatter of forcibly reminded us that we were penetrating the regions beyond---were truly pioneers of a new enterprise. We were fast adding new and interesting experiences.¹²

It is hard not to miss the enthusiasm that she felt for the new project at hand, after all for a missionary going off into the unknown among the heathens was the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan for them on earth. Mary Clark’s account resembles the parlance of a colonizer on the verge of an important acquisition, because like the colonizer the missionary too was looking for subjects, the only difference being that these subjects were for the benefit of the Heavenly king.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 30.

¹² Ibid.

In Quest of a Voice

Mary Louise Pratt talks about two essential types of narrative figures in travel writing, termed as the 'manners and customs' figure and the 'sentimental' figure. The basic difference between these two figures is that the former is largely impersonal where the narrator is absent, while the latter figure foregrounds the narrator. Pratt says that even within travel texts, the narrative figure is not a unitary source of information and all of the statements within travel writing do not issue from the same narrative figure. In the manners and customs figure, certain statements emanate from an impersonal source which is not identical with the narrator who travels from place to place. According to Pratt these statements come from 'an unknown site behind the speaking "I", behind the periphery of what is seen, from a seat of power that should probably be identified with the state.'¹³ In such a situation, people only occur in the texts as representative figures, or as traces when landscapes are described as if they were empty of people. Instead of human interaction, there are many descriptions of the landscape and 'In the main, what is narrated proves to be a descriptive sequence of sights/sites, with the traveller presented chiefly as a kind of collective moving eye which registers these sights.'¹⁴

The second type of narrator which Pratt describes is the sentimental traveller, where the narrator and the individual indigenous inhabitants are portrayed as taking part in a dramatic narrative. Here, individuals from the country are presented in dialogue with the narrator, and Pratt notes:

If the land-scanning, self-effacing producer of information is associated with the state, then this sentimental, experimental voice must be associated with that critical sector of the bourgeois world, the private sphere, home of the solitary, introspecting individual.¹⁵

Because of this concentration on the private sphere, many women travellers adapted this narrative figure for their texts. However, Pratt notes that these texts, although they seem more personal than the manners and customs texts, are just as much part of European colonial expansion as others. Their intention of making the country known to Europeans is submerged in their personal tales of adventure, but their function is still that of expansion and domination.¹⁶

¹³ Marie Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen", *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 12, no. 1, 1985, p. 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India* is a complex text when we try to locate it within the context of the plot form. The events in the book are not narrated chronologically and there is no sequence. Leaving aside these conventional norms of writing, the narrative voice itself is problematic if we want to label her as a "sentimental" or "manners and customs" figure. Some incidents in the text are presented in a dramatic behavior whereas sections which deal with the environment, climate, native customs and lifestyle are directly reported in the convention of an impersonal guide book. This serves to heighten the feeling that the narrator does not figure anywhere in the narration, at the same time enforcing her presence throughout the text.

In the very beginning of her book, Mary Clark proceeds to acquaint her readers with the Nagas, the "savages" who would become her subjects afterwards:

"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, and nothing short of landing it inside the house would satisfy them. Thus I was introduced to these stalwart, robust warriors, dressed mostly in war medals, each man grasping his spear shaft decorated with goat's hair, dyed red and yellow, and also fringed with the long black hair of a woman, telling the story of bloody deeds.¹⁷

The dramatic and colorful opening of the book however shifts its focus from the people to a description about Assam, rendering a shift in the narration where she appropriates an impersonal voice-over:

But first, ere we enter this hill country, a few words about Assam. Originally it was the valley of the Bhramaputra River, and for the last three-quarters of a century has been part of the great empire of India. An alluvial plain of great fertility, about fifteen hundred miles in length, with an average breadth of fifty miles, it extends to the extreme northeast of India, touching Tibet and Burma and reaching far toward China. It is peopled by various races of Aryan and Mongolian stock, which differ widely in customs, language, and religion.¹⁸

In the style of a proper traveller's manual, she next gives an account of the climate in Assam:

Although Assam lies wholly within the temperate zone, its climate partakes of that of the tropics, ranging from forty degrees to one hundred degrees Fahrenheit, with an average of seventy-five degrees. The atmosphere is very humid, and the annual rainfall about one hundred inches. This heavy precipitation upon an extremely fertile soil causes excessive vegetable growth and decay, and induces, as would be expected, much malaria and fever. Cherra Punji, an exposed point in the hills, has some four hundred and eighty-nine

¹⁷ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

inches of rain yearly, the largest known rainfall in the world.¹⁹

She records the management and division of political power among the Nagas in the villages, noting that “each village is a little democracy managing its own affairs, except as other villagers interfere either voluntarily or by partisan invitation...”²⁰

The Naga ceremony of courtship and marriage are also commented upon:

Girls are usually betrothed from the age of eleven to fourteen years, parents generally arranging for this union, but the young people sometimes make their own choice...Marriage is celebrated by the bridegroom simply taking his bride to a new home, but in well-to-do families a feast is served and wedding presents bestowed.²¹

However there are passages in her narration which show her dealing with the natives on a personal level, such as was expected of a missionary's wife, who had to foster a relationship with the natives, especially with the women. She presents an interaction with the womenfolk in the extract below:

As I went among the women, one would ask:

“Is your mother living?”

“Yes.”

“She must be awfully old.”

“Have you any children?”

Then as the story was related of one angel child above, there would come from a sympathetic, sorrowing mother:

“Beautiful, beautiful words, how sweet to hear! I wish I knew how to believe them. Did you come all the way to tell us this?”

As we continued to speak of the home above and of salvation through Jesus alone, another would say:

“Do hear her sweet words!”

Another calls out,

“How is your cloth woven?”

“Do they wear such cloth in heaven?”

“How smooth your hair is; do you have lice in it?”

Answering this last, several voices exclaimed: “Do tell! What medicine do you use?”²²

The missionary's duty of making house calls ensured a steady contact with the personal aspect of native life but the difference is always stressed in the account. The above passage moreover serves to widen the gap between the civilised and the uncivilized, and the fascination and awe felt by the natives for their masters. It reinforces a relationship which can be possible but never

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

²¹ Ibid., p. 49.

²² Ibid., p. 94-95

on equal terms, for the 'memsahib' is a world apart from her native subjects. The differences of their two entities are further stressed by her:

The people of our village were, in their way, considerate of us, and evidently tried to show us sympathy in our isolation; and yet, poor creatures, how could they appreciate what we were giving up to bring so much to them! A Naga, returning from work one day, came up to us holding by the tail a huge lizard, and asked, "Father, will you eat a piece?" Perhaps we looked hungry.²³

Sara Mill's illustrates how the travel writing genre experienced a number of changes in its conventions over time, and by the nineteenth century writers tended to divide their books into two distinct sections, one for their journal and one for general observations, and it was only the latter which was published. She continues:

By the nineteenth century this was almost a convention for most travel writing, and demonstrates the way in which external discursive factors structure the format of the text.²⁴

The absence of form and structure in Mary Clark's text can be understood better when we look at the position taken by Percy Adams, who consider the interpolation or digression as central to the structure of the travel book. He suggests that digressions are essential in the travel text because they authenticate the journey and "what may be called digressions in some forms of literature are for travel accounts structurally inherent."²⁵

Mary Clark's figure as a narrator is not wholly the 'sentimental' nor the 'manners and customs' figure as she tries to strike a balance between these two conventions. Unlike Pratt's 'manners and customs' figure who omits personal details, Mrs. Clark strings together highly subjective anecdotes, personal encounters, etc. However as illustrated earlier, her account is not completely personal, as sometimes she assumes the note of objectivity and impersonality in the telling. This may be because she was conscious all the time of writing as a missionary as well as a woman, and thus a balance between the two modes of writing had to be forged which she executed adequately. The conventions of travel writing presented a framework of largely masculine narratorial positions and descriptive patterns with which women writers had to negotiate when

²³ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁴ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 84-85.

²⁵ Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1983, p. 209.

they constructed their travel accounts.²⁶

The Clarion Call

Travel writing followed strict conventions **that** stated exactly what type of information could be included. However, Charles Batten has **illustrated** that these conventions are **not static** but change according to the dictates of the age. **He notes** that in the eighteenth century, **travelers** generally described architecture, but then there came a **radical change** to descriptions of **soil and crops**. In his words:

Whereas mountains, plains and rivers had formerly **served to instruct** the reader concerning **their utility as** boundaries, sources of food, defences, and their **influences on national manners and customs**, **these natural** features become the primary topics of description **servng** for the most part simply as a **source of amusement** for the traveller and his readers.²⁷

This shows that the production of travel literature **was influenced** by the changing tastes of the reader and the traveller, who usually liked to read **and write** about the unknown and **the strange** aspects of life, which were alien from their everyday **experiences**.

At this point it would be interesting to look into the **constraints** in production of missionary texts and the objectives that lay behind their production. **The nineteenth century** witnessed a **great** increase in missionary activity in India, especially **after 1833**. Missionary writings around **this** time disseminated the knowledge of the “heathen” to **the civilized world**, and at the **same time** highlighted the sense of romance and adventure **associated** with uplifting people of a lesser situation. They did not write simply about the native **way of life** but included the discourse of adventure in their accounts, to serve as an inspiration to **their young readers**. For instance, missionary texts operated at various levels:

On the one hand they contributed to creating “**knowledge**” **about** the “poverty-stricken” and “down-trodden” Other for churchgoers at home. Simultaneously, **they created** an appealing discourse of **service** underscoring the challenge and adventure inherent in the **choice to become** an overseas missionary. Using specific metaphors and stereotypical images, such texts **served a clear political purpose**, appealing to the “superior” Christian/European self to go forth with the **Message in order** to “redeem” souls.²⁸

²⁶ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 24, p. 86.

²⁷ Charles Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth Century Travel Literature*, Berkley : University of California Press, 1978, p. 99.

²⁸ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 1, p. 158,

In this respect, Mary Clark's *A Corner in India* is revealingly a clarion call to potential recruits in the fields. Dedicated not only to her husband and "friends in this and other lands," the book is also a dedication to "the young men and women who are needed to further plant the banner of the cross among savage tribes." The preface of the book clearly states her objective:

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 in behalf of the savage tribes whose habits, customs, and possibilities are here depicted from personal observation through many years.²⁹

Here the Christian readers are requested to intervene on behalf of the savages, who cannot be redeemed or rescued without help from people of more fortunate circumstances. Such kinds of literature were usually for the benefit of the donors/sponsors at the home mission as well as potential recruits. The Introduction to *A Corner in India* has been written by William Ellsworth Witter, another fellow missionary and a contemporary of the Clark's in the Assam Mission. The glowing review describes it as a "racy" book:

While Doctor Clark continues his personal ministry to the wild tribes of Assam, among which he has spent so many years of self-sacrificing service, it will be a pleasure to many in America to read the racy glimpses of life among the warlike Nagas by Mrs. Clark who, after sharing so long the perils of these frontier experiences, is now detained in America.³⁰

As corresponding to the heroic and the difficulties involved in an overseas missionaries life, the book lives up to its promise, and the targets in this case are the young readers at home. Witter continues in the Introduction:

We especially commend this interesting narrative to the hosts of young people, many of whom are almost persuaded that the heroic in missions is forever passed. Let them follow some of those distant mountain paths, cross the steep ravines and swollen rivers, face the wild tribes still waiting for the gospel, and marvel at what God has wrought among those who have received the message...this is a fine book for vacation 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.³¹

By highlighting the romance of the missionary profession and at the same time stressing the aesthetic quality of the book, Witter like a true exponent of the Mission urges the young readers to step out and proselytize to the heathen population in the wilderness.

²⁹ See "Preface", in Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4.

³⁰ See "Introduction", in *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

However the missionary makes it clear that in spite of the sense of adventure and romance associated with overseas missions, evangelizing in the hinterlands is a difficult task to follow, often leading to frustration and desolation. There is always the reminder to readers that life as a missionary entails sacrificing the comforts of home for a life of austerity, and Mrs. Clark quotes a letter from Rev. Perrine, a missionary who with his wife joined the Clarks in 1892 in order to assist them with the Mission. Perrine's letter reads as follows:

If you don't know how much 'stuff' you have, move to the Naga Hills, and you will find out...Life in the jungles of this frontier is a Swiss Family Robinson sort of life with variations...Let no one get the impression that all of our surroundings are ideally perfect—that we have no trials, no strain on our patience, and what is more, nothing to test our faith and Christian character.³²

In the end, the cheerful countenance of the missionary is conveyed, despite the inconveniences and discomfiture of the surroundings. This was the essential message that the missionaries wanted to communicate to all their supporters and sympathizers.

In 1893, the Clark's and the Perrine's were further strengthened by the arrival of Rev. F. P. Haggard and his family as an additional force for the Mission. Yet again, Mary Clark stresses the hardships of a missionary's life as she writes:

For the benefit of those who think that missionaries live too luxuriously, we copy from Mr. Haggard's letters on his entrance upon the Ao Naga work. His letters also show how necessary all-round missionaries are for frontier fields.³³

And she shares an extract from Haggard's letter with her readers:

Possibly you would like to know why I have been so busy of late. We have been transforming an old schoolhouse into a dwelling, and since it was necessary to finish it before the rainy season began, we had to hurry. We are now fully installed, and I am writing upon my desk that I made from a box in which some of our goods came from America. Our kitchen table, washstand, bureau, cupboards, etc., have the same origin. You see, we do not care to put on any style here, but we are glad to be able to live happily and cosily and contentedly amid our surroundings, so different and with resources so much less than we had in America.³⁴

The above quoted letter sums up the ideal missionary spirit of optimism, enthusiasm and the ability to adjust with any kind of discomfort, and such virtues were particularly celebrated in their literatures. This attitude of learning to adjust with their surroundings is reflected in Mary

³² Ibid., p. 136-37.

³³ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 133-34.

Clark's words:

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!³⁵

Thus, the experiences of the missionaries away from their homeland were glorified in the literatures they produced. On the other hand, the discussion of the heroic element of overseas mission brings up the issue of the adventure narrative and its implications when narrated by a woman.

Gazing on the Adventuring Hero

Critics like Martin Green argue that the adventure narrative is "the energising of myth of empire"³⁶ and for him, a celebration of adventure meant a celebration of empire.³⁷ Green describes the way in which this myth is profoundly gendered, making itself more available for male writers:

Adventure seems to mean a series of events, partly but not wholly accidental, in settings remote from the domestic and probably from the civilised...which constitute a challenge to the central character. In meeting this challenge, he performs a series of exploits which make him a hero, eminent in virtues such as courage, fortitude, cunning, strength, leadership and persistence.³⁸

Incidents of danger and survival in the adventure narrative decreed that it was a male domain since the conventions for descriptions of such incidents by women would be considered improper and indecorous. Sara Mills opines that the adventure hero is the perfect colonial subject, or at least the perfect colonial *male* subject.³⁹ The nineteenth century was an age when women travellers wrote in great numbers. It was also an age which marked a rise in the popularity of adventure narratives, as Peter Hulme states:

It might be said that the 'pure' adventure story, which has to take place outside metropolitan Europe, and preferably in as remote an area as possible, reached its apogee as the tentacles of European colonialism were at their greatest reach in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁶ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure-Deeds of Empire*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. xi.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁹ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 24, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 183.

The adventure narrative as one of the conventions of travel writing was appropriated by women writers in the plot form, but it was mostly with a degree of uneasiness because the adventuring hero role clashed with other discursive constructions of how women behave. It is interesting to look at how Mary Mead Clark negotiates with the adventure narrative, at the same time positioning herself as the narrative voice while foregrounding the figure of her husband as the adventure hero. Numerous instances from the text are attestations of her uneasiness in dealing with this convention.

Mr. Clark emerges as the heroic figure, marching on ahead into the untamed wilds, far beyond the protection of the English flag, as his wife documents his progress in *A Corner in India*. The initial foray into the hills required more than the permission of the English government, and without courage and determination it would not have been possible:

The English government was 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. But the call, "Go teach all nations," and the promise, "Lo, I am with you alway," nerved my husband to brave all perils that he might there plant the banner of the cross...At first it was a presumptuous venture to go far outside the village stockade, not only on account of lurking enemies, but because of numerous hidden pongees, to step upon which would occasion severe, if not fatal, wounds.⁴¹

In the account cited above she clearly depicts the constant danger that threatened her husband's well-being, but oblivious to all else except the dissemination of the Gospel among the heathen, Clark labored on and:

The missionary's presence and his teachings had spread like wildfire from mountain peak to mountain peak and everywhere was fostered the suspicious spirit.⁴²

Rev. Clark had to face the strong opposition of the savages, majority of who were antagonistic to the new religion he professed:

Hostility to the new religion waxed stronger and stronger...To intimidate the missionary, a war party of young men ambushed one whole week for human heads, which they intended to throw down before him as symbolical of what he might expect himself in case he did not retreat to the plains. They returned, however, without booty, but racked with fever, thus affording the missionary an opportunity of exercising some medical and taming their savagery.⁴³

⁴¹ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

The wide gap between the uncivilized mass and the civilised missionary is clearly reflected here. The savages stand for everything untamed and violent whereas the missionary is the epitome of western values, who can tame their savagery single-handedly with his knowledge of medicine. He became the guardian of the converted and they became “his people”. Here Mary Clark poses the question:

Was the planting of this new colony the beginning of a people for the Lord in these mountain wilds? The missionary resolved to stand by this people, to throw in his lot with them, trusting in the Lord alone for protection.⁴⁴

In typical missionary parlance, the beliefs and superstitions of the natives are belittled and shown as ineffective when pitted against Christianity. Mrs. Clark relates how her husband in one of his tours shatters a common superstition of the natives, thus solidifying his own status as more powerful and invincible than any of their gods:

On one of the frequent marches between Molung and Dekha Haimong villages, Mr. Clark inquired 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. 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, 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.⁴⁵

All the instances show the missionary as the fearless protector of the people, who can even defy the wrath of the native gods. The success of this venture resulted in the village boys making a mockery of the once revered and deified rock:

It was, however, some time before women ventured on the path, but the old-time road has now long since grown up to jungle, and all sorts of desecrations are practiced on that once hallowed stone by boys who have outgrown their fathers’ theology.⁴⁶

Apart from being the man to open the natives’ eyes to the baseless ness of their old religion, Clark was also the defender of their safety in the face of attacks from the wild animals. Mary Clark relates how he helped in disposing of a man-eating tiger in the village, which had carried off a woman:

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁶ Ibid

At the peep of day every able-bodied man of the village was ready for a tiger hunt. On finding the remains of the woman, Mr. Clark was besought to inject poison therein, and soon the much dreaded foe was found stretched lifeless where he had taken his last meal. The animal was borne to the village in triumph and placed on an elevated platform; and the shouts of rejoicing that went up would make the American "three cheers" sound in comparison like a drawing-room solo. The tiger's skin decorated the bamboo floor of our Naga drawing-room.⁴⁷

In another instance, the villagers come asking for Clark's help to kill an elephant. This situation as skillfully presented as an example of how the once fierce headhunters have become dependant on the white sahib. Mrs. Clark narrates:

... They would not sleep until they had exacted a promise from Mr. Clark to join them with his gun in the hunt on the morrow. "It is very dangerous, father," they said, "for an elephant to be thus wandering at will about the village..."⁴⁸

The presence of the gun enforces Clark's importance in the village, and the villagers are likened to children unable to do anything without the help of their "father". They set out on the hunt the next day and the gun is instrumental in bringing down the elephant:

The sun was sinking low in the west, when, hark! A crushing and crunching among the bamboos was heard; slowly and stealthily the hunters advanced. Hush. Sh-h! Sh-h! On, on, quietly and cautiously. Bang! And by one well-directed shot this mass of living flesh fell to the ground. The forest rang with shouts and yells.⁴⁹

Clark's popularity increased a result of his success in dealing with the tiger and the elephant, and Mary Clark rightly remarks in the book, "this may be a small matter, but it proved a strong tie in binding the people to their religious teacher."⁵⁰

When Mary Clark uses the convention of the adventure narrative and makes her husband the hero of her narration, there is a slight shift of power relations. For example, she often emerges from her invisibility in the account and assumes the dominant position. This had to do with the scenario that placed missionary wives in positions of authority over their racial Others. It has been observed that, "as they supervised and lorded over the "native" male laborers, they were liberated from some of the gender hierarchies within their own patriarchies."⁵¹ There are several

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp 60-61.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 1, p. 90.

instances which testify that her experiences with the natives involved a shift of power that made her the “memsahib” ruling over her subjects. On the occasion of Mrs. Clark’s first venture to the hills to join her husband, she describes the difficult journey:

To continue our journey hillward, early the second day the Naga Hills “goods train” arrived, men and women in large numbers, each bringing a native basket to be filled or the bark band to attach to a piece of luggage, all of which had to be arranged in parcels exceeding about sixty pounds...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 never was a queen more revered by her subjects than was now the wife of the Naga Hills’ missionary by his parishioners.⁵²

Thus, very much in the manner carried by her subjects and escorted by her chieftains, Mary Clark sets out to the Hills which will be her new home. Her duties in the Hills were numerous, ranging from running the school for girls, dispensing medical help to the sick, taking part in the affairs of the village and being an ideal helpmeet for her husband. Her account shows that she was an active participant in the quest for “winning souls”:

Bringing the Gospel to these savage hill tribes taxed to the utmost the resources of the missionary. A good knowledge of their language, habits, and character is absolutely essential for gaining their confidence and winning souls. Some knowledge of medicine is also of great advantage; it is an open door into many homes, and puts an end to consulting soothsayers and sacrificing to demons. Medical works were therefore added to our library. Frequent councils were held with our people on village and inter-village matters; ambassadors from beyond our borders came for advice, and thus many difficulties were settled in a satisfactory and peaceable manner which otherwise might have ended in bloody conflict. We were alert to show the people that we were not among them for the benefit of a single village, but for the best good of all.⁵³

The entire passage depicts an image of an ideal colony which has been restored to peace and order with the arrival of the rightful rulers. Knowledge as power was used to conquer the prejudices of the people, and the missionary couple won their confidence so much as to enable them to participate in the running of the village. Since their ambition did not exclude the areas beyond Molung, they were careful to nurture a relationship of trust with the other villages so as to enable them to proceed with their proselytizing work. A particular trait of missionary literature seems to be that, in writing about the heathen both male and female missionaries joined in common cause and echoed each others rhetoric about the ‘plight’ of ‘christless souls.’ The parlance of female writers in this respect appears to echo the voice of the male adventurer and conqueror, and as a result the shift of power is evident in such discourses.

⁵² Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, pp. 28-29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

At times the position of power is so blatantly **displayed**, as in the event when the Clark's made a brief visit to Sibsagar, since they had gone for **nine months** "without having seen a **white face**." It was a welcome "little touch again with civilization"⁵⁴ and on their return journey to the Hills they were greeted with great joy from the villagers:

At Amguri my hill-chair awaited me and we **were in due time** again on the hilltop. Such a **hearty welcome** from the people! One of our parishioners **exclaimed**, "there has been no flavor in my food since the **Sahib** and Mem Sahib have been away."⁵⁵

Every period of absence is waited with an **enthusiastic** display of welcome, showing how indispensable the Clark's had become to the **general affairs** of the village. Mrs. Clark, **after** a sojourn in Sibsagar returned to the Hills **accompanied** by her husband in the midst of an inter-village strife. But they had nothing to fear, for **their subjects** had turned up to protect them:

In honor of my return, also to show appreciation of **Mr. Clark's** services in the recent **unpleasant affair**, the chief men of Molung dressed in their finest **were down with** Mr. Clark to meet me. As I **remarked**, "with such trouble on our path, how can I go up?" they **replied**, "Why, Mem Sahib, the whole 'kingdom' is down to take care of you." And sure enough here was the **entire village** force ready to do us free service.⁵⁶

And she continues to describe the hard journey:

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.⁵⁷

As an adventuring figure in the position of power **over her** subjects, she is protected and taken care of, no matter how difficult the task. The savages **became** her 'body-guards,' attending to **her** well-being. However the tension involved in **assigning** to them the heroic role as well as the inconveniences during traveling creates awkwardness **in the** very telling itself. In Mary Clark's case, though she is the 'queen' of her 'kingdom,' **she takes** care to include the figure of **her** husband in her narrative, and she as a figure emerges **only** occasionally. Moreover, she **makes** herself helpless and dependant on the natives to carry **her**, although it is a reversal of roles because she is in a superior position and hence can **command** the obedience of the natives.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 77

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Travel narratives written by women had certain expectations such as the physical discomfort suffered by women and the amount of physical endurance that this demanded. Dervla Murphy comments in the introduction to Ella Maillart's book *Forbidden Journey*:

This is what travel-and travel writing-is all about...if there were fleas or lice, they bit her; if a pony or camel collapsed, she walked; if there was no food, she went hungry; if the sun was too hot, she sweated; if blizzards blew, she froze.⁵⁸

Mary Clark disclaims her appropriation of the 'hero' position by constantly stressing on the difficulties of travel, which is an expected norm of women's travel writing. In the course of her first visit to the Naga Hills, she mentions the constraints brought on by clothing decorum during the trip:

I constantly 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.⁵⁹

This predicament is presented with a humorous and self-mocking note and it explains her negotiation with the heroic role. Sara Mills is of the opinion that women writers have difficulty in adopting the 'adventuress' role with ease, since it was considered strictly to be a masculine domain. However when women do adopt this role, they often modify it by disclaimers and by humorous interventions, and also by stressing on the difficulties of travel.⁶⁰ An instance where the difficulties of travel are underscored occurs in Nina Mazuchelli's *The Indian Alps and How we Crossed them* and Mills supplies clear illustrations from the text to attest this.

Conquering to Conquer

A discussion of *A Corner in India* would be incomplete without considering the extent of Rev. E. W. Clark's influence in the setting up of American Baptist Missions among the key tribes in the Naga Hills. It would not be an exaggeration to label him as the architect of the Baptist Mission in the Naga Hills, which will be evidenced from the instances below. Clark saw the possibility of successful missionary activity in the hills from his initial days in the Mission Press in Sibsagar, as his wife records:

⁵⁸ Ella Maillart, *Forbidden Journey*, London: Heinemann, Rpt 1983, p. xvi.

⁵⁹ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 30.

⁶⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 24, p. 78.

From the broad veranda of the mission bungalow we looked out day after day, on and on beyond the villages, across the rice fields, over the jungles of the 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.⁶¹

Clark was determined to be the man who would tame the heathens inhabiting the mountains and bring them the “good tidings.” On apprising the Assamese Christians of the desire to “bear the message to those distant wilds,” they were discouraged from the beginning:

...They shook their heads doubtfully. “They are savages, sahib, village warring with village, constantly cutting off heads to get skulls.” But my husband replied:
“The voice of my departed Lord,
‘Go teach all nations’...
Comes on the night air and awakes my ear,
And I will go.”⁶²

According to Mani Chawla Singh, the early missionaries in South Asia, as in Africa and elsewhere, had free-play in choosing the areas in which to settle, begin missionary work, and from which to expand to adjacent regions. Their work involved uncertainties, health hazards, experimentation with evangelical methods, and a degree of cultural adaptation before the Gospel message could be disseminated among the “heathen.”

North American missionaries were governed by the missionary boards of the sponsoring societies, often getting instructions from the United States. Yet, in fact, living in a British colony, they could hardly afford to annoy colonial authority, since they depended on the colonial state for the allotment of land, grants for maintenance, and eventually for state recognition of their schools and hospitals. She observes that until the 1870’s, it was common for missionaries to actually arrive in a region and tour the countryside to select a “promising field.”⁶³

In true missionary spirit, Clark could not bear the thought of leaving unevangelised so many potential converts in such close proximity. In a time when missionary activity was in its zenith all over India, the wildness of the Naga Hills was enough to invoke a sense of responsibility in any missionary who had the proper will and spirit. Clark proved to be a man of great determination and tried to pave a way to the hills until he succeeded. Mrs. A. K. Gurney’s paper

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶² Ibid., 9-10.

⁶³ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathens Lands”*: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860’s-1940’s), n. 1, pp. 46-48.

“History of the Sibsagar Field” presented during the Jubilee Conference of the Mission in 1886 mentions Mr. Clark’s zeal to work among the Nagas:

Mr. Clark from the first was strongly drawn to the Naga Hills. In 1871 he wrote---“I am assured that for some ten or twelve years past, there has been very little proclamation of the gospel to the heathen in this part of Assam, by a missionary. Tribe upon tribe of Nagas are accessible to the gospel. It is certainly painful for us at Sibsagar to be unable to lift our eyes without seeing these hills and thinking of the men on them who have no knowledge of Christ.”⁶⁴

The Nagas were suspicious of any white man, whom they thought to be “Company” spies trying to break into the barrier of the mountains. Because of this problem, the services of Godhula, an Assamese evangelist, was utilized to make the first venture into the territory in 1871⁶⁵ and, managing to win some converts, moved to the hills with his wife in April 1872 to continue work among the villagers of Molung. In November of the same year, the couple returned to the plains with a company of Nagas for baptism. Clark finally set foot in the hills for the first time in December 1872 and returned, more enthusiastic than ever. Mary Clark writes about his return in her account:

I believe I have found my life-work,” exclaimed Mr. Clark as he entered the old press bungalow on his return from his twelve days’ absence in the wilds of barbarism.⁶⁶

Since Clark had his duties to perform in the Mission Press, he was relieved by the appointment of Rev. A. K. Gurney to replace him and at long last moved to Dekha Haimong village (Molung) in the Naga Hills in March 1876.⁶⁷ Clark was venturing out to the unadministered hills with the permission, but without the protection of the imperial power. Mrs. Clark sums up the situation in her book as:

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 expectation whatever of protection from British arms.⁶⁸

Clark was so dedicated to his work among the Ao Nagas that he declined the invitation of the Missionary Union to return for a furlough to America. He was also left to labour alone among

⁶⁴ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, Guwahati: Spectrum, Rpt 1992, p. 25.

⁶⁵ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

the natives, since his Assamese helper “**weakened** under the trails and perils of a **pioneer life** in the Naga Hills.” In the report “**Historical Sketch of the Lhota Naga Mission**” **presented** by Rev. W. E. Witter during the Jubilee conference, **he** quotes an extract from Clark’s report of January 1877:

But never mind that now...I know the **exclusion** from civilization, and the hardships and privations of living alone in a Naga village make up a **pretty tough sacrifice** (I was ten months **here without seeing a white face**) yet I am more than convinced **that in the Hills among the people is the place for him to live who would evangelize this people.**⁶⁹

In the month of March 1878, Mrs. Clark **returned** from a furlough in America and **joined her** husband in the field, and started a school for girls.⁷⁰ After establishing a Mission **among the Ao Nagas**, Clark turned the Board’s attention **towards** the other neighboring Naga tribes, **putting forward** the question whether “the tidings of **the Gospel of the ‘Prince of Peace’**” were meant for the Ao’s alone.⁷¹ Clark’s presence and success **among the Ao tribes** compelled **the Board** to consider the other Naga tribes. Rev. S. W. Rivenburg in his Jubilee paper on “**Historical Sketch of the Angami Naga Mission**” credits Clark for **the Mission in Kohima**:

In compliance with the earnest request of Rev. E. W. Clark, laboring among the Ao Nagas, **the Board**, in 1878, appointed Rev. C. D. King missionary to **the Naga Hills** with permission to plant a station **wherever he thought best.**⁷²

Mr. King proceeded to Kohima, after the Angami region had been stabilized by **the presence** of the British imperial army. He was joined by **his wife** in March, 1882. In March 29th, 1883 the Kings along with four Assamese Christians **organized themselves** into the Kohima Baptist Church.⁷³

Clark was also the man instrumental in bringing **the Mission** to the Lotha Naga area as “**he did not allow his eyes to remain fixed upon his own field; they fell upon another people just as rude and savage.**”⁷⁴ Rev. W. E. Witter in his Jubilee report “**Historical Sketch of the Lhota Naga Mission**” from Clark’s letter of 1877:

⁶⁹ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n. 64, p. 88.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

A road is being made from the plain of Assam up to Wokha. The political agent will probably occupy Wokha another year, when it will doubtless be a safe place to live. Its height and location should give it a fine climate. Wokha is a large Naga village and other large villages are near. Let the missionary family go there.⁷⁵

The Witters were appointed to the Mission in Wokha and in April 9th 1885 Mr and Mrs. Witter were stationed at the Wokha Mission.⁷⁶ Both husband and wife found themselves busy with the administering of the Gospel, translating the Bible in the vernacular and opening schools among the natives.

Thus three Missions were established among the Nagas with the active intervention of Mr. Clark. However, he found the need to set up more Missions among the other Naga tribes, as is evident from his Jubilee report in 1886, "Gospel Destitution about Assam." Clark was of the view that:

...there are among the Nagas on the Assam side, three mission stations, one in the Ao tribe, one in the Lhota tribe, and one among the Angamis. There are other openings. One that is quite desirable to occupy soon is that among the Semas, a large and vigorous tribe behind the Ao and Lhota Nagas...A missionary could occupy one of these not far from Wokha, thus he and the one at Wokha could support each other by counsel, co-operation, and occasional visits, especially in case of illness. The Witters at Wokha are sadly isolated. In positions among barbarians, where there is scarcely a European in the neighborhood, it is quite desirable that missionaries be near enough to strengthen each other's hands. This real desideratum of the Witters could be obtained as above indicated, and at the same time the gospel be given to a large and powerful tribe who have never heard it.⁷⁷

The advent of Clark to the Ao Nagas opened up the Gospel to the other tribes nearby and it was Clark's ambition to bring the entire Naga Hills as well as the regions beyond under the Missionary Union. Mrs. Clark echoes this desire in *A Corner in India*:

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.⁷⁸

When the Clark's went back to America in 1901 after thirty years of working among the Ao Nagas, they left behind a contribution unmatched by any other missionary stationed in the Naga Hills. The missionary zeal for conquest and expansion proved to be vastly successful in the yet unconquered Hills, in which Rev. Clark conspicuously emerged as the most important figure.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

⁷⁸ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 135.

Collecting Curiosities

The production of missionary texts was **determined** by a number of complex factors. In the first place, they were expected to compile **reports** in the usual colonial tradition of documentation of knowledge, presenting the **ungodly natives** and their customs as **curiosities** for the civilised readers. Secondly, overseas missionaries were “encouraged to write-not only **letters** to kin and home congregations but also **reports**, articles, memoirs, travelogues, and autobiographical and anecdotal narratives”⁷⁹ to their **friends**, family and church at home.

Thus, they were fulfilling a professional **obligation** by keeping up a steady flow of correspondence from their respective stations to **the home mission**. Thirdly, such **texts were** written with the intention of winning potential **recruits** from the home front to **venture out** overseas among the savages, and they usually **presented a missionary’s** life so as to **romanticize** as well as glorify the profession. Missionary wives, **apart** from the task of **handling the** correspondence, had a lot of other duties to perform **as well** which included **running schools**, dispensaries, managing the women’s societies etc. **Mary Mead Clark’s** account *A Corner in India* merits examination as it serves to exemplify how a **woman/ missionary/wife/writer negotiated** with these above issues in her writings.

At this point it is interesting to look at Sara Mills’ **thesis** on women’s involvement in colonialism. She argues that the texts produced by **women are** no different from those **produced** by men, although their relation to the dominant discourses **differs**. She goes on to say:

Because the critical work on women travel writers has **centered on the** women authors as **individual rebels** against the constraints of Victorian society, much of it has **simply** discussed the women themselves **and not** their relation to the countries they are describing or the **part women** travelers played in colonialism.⁸⁰

In *A Corner in India* Mary Clark endeavors to document **the natives** as subjects, almost in the manner of an anthropologist. The titles of the chapters such as “The Savage at Home,” “Savage Oratory and Visiting Cards,” “The Savage in Costume and at Work,” and “Savage Worship and Strange Legends” indicate the documentation of every aspect of native life for readers. Following the conventions of the guide book generally adopted by travel writers, Mrs. Clark

⁷⁹ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860’s-1940’s)*, n. 1, p. 138.

⁸⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 24, p. 39.

proceeds to acquaint her readers with the climatic conditions of the region:

In all this mountainous region the humidity of the tropic 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.⁸¹

Next, she talks about the principal crops, the plant and the animal lives in the region. Of the plants, she writes:

Orchids, rhododendrons, beautifully colored begonias; the tree fern, mosses, creepers, and vines abound in great variety and luxuriance. The hollyhock, 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.⁸²

Nature and the organic life all around were documented as a part of the great unknown, and all available information were disseminated to the readers at home. While presenting these information, there was always the tendency to compare or contrast the familiar with the unknown in the accounts. Mrs. Clark goes on to describe the agricultural implements, crops, the quality of the soil and the articles of commerce in the hills. Further she talks at length about the animal life, giving out an insecure and unsafe picture of life in these wild areas:

Of wild animals, the elephant and wild boar are very troublesome on the rice cultivations...monkeys too, in great numbers and many varieties, help themselves freely to the cultivator's subsistence. Tigers and leopards not infrequently feast on a cow, goat, or pig taken from beneath a house in the village; bears roam by night in these mountain fastnesses; wild dogs in packs and many smaller foes to domestic animals have their homes here. There is a tradition that the unicorn once roamed over these hills.⁸³

The sense of danger threatening the survival of humans and other domestic animals by the abundance of wild animals is, however romanticized by the native lore of the unicorn. Native customs and values, on the whole, were condemned as 'uncivilized' and 'barbarous,' belonging to a lesser people of a lesser culture:

Within and near the gates were the "barracks" for unmarried warriors, abounding in unmistakable evidences of an uncivilized and barbarous people.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 36.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

For such a wretched tribe, the only way to **improve themselves and abandon their wild existence** was to embrace Christianity, western culture's **answer** to civilization. Of the Nagas, Mary Clark held the opinion that they, "once civilized **and** Christianized, will make a **manly, worthy** people."⁸⁵

So far as the missionaries were concerned, the **people** inhabiting the hill districts of Assam were "demon-worshippers", however because of the **absence** of any established religion **among them**, the region was regarded as "...a virgin soil, **the richest** in all this valley for **gospel seed-sowing**."⁸⁶

The absence of any established religion in the **hills was** incentive enough for the missionaries to justify their evangelical zeal. In Mary Clark's words:

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. **They believe** that the soul does not die with the body, trust in **omens of all sorts**, and consult them in **every important undertaking**...⁸⁷

Conversion of the natives is here portrayed as **easily brought about**, almost with the **willing** consent of the natives. The actual details of initial **hostility and opposition** to the new **religion are** conveniently left out in the discourse. There is even **an attempt** to draw a parallel between the old religion of the natives and Christianity, and Mrs. Clark points out that the abstract concept of 'sin' in the native belief corresponds to the Christian **concept** 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**...Atonement for sin among the Aos costs **something**, and no strong argument is required to **convince** them of personal sin and the need of salvation therefrom.⁸⁸

Moreover, the missionaries saw in the age-old beliefs of **the people** traces of the Biblical story of the tree of life and a cruder version of the great flood. For instance Mary Clark questioned as to whether the ancient truth might be prevailing among these **natives**:

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp 59-60.

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 ignorant people some tradition of the true flood?⁸⁹

The Christian concept of hell as an eternal place of damnation for all sinners also had a place in the Ao religious belief. Mrs. Clark records:

Again, Mr. Clark, in his Bible translation, has had no difficulty in finding an Ao word “for the fire that never shall be quenched.” The idea 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.⁹⁰

Missionaries participated full-fledgedly in the dissemination of knowledge about the Other, while simultaneously contributing to the entire process of colonial image –making. Joan-Pau Rubies, in talking about the full dimension of Renaissance anthropology, says that its phenomenon cannot be understood “merely by studying the intellectual constructions of jurists and theologians concerned with defining the nature of man and of human political society.”⁹¹

The authority of a traveller, he goes on to say, was never an issue to be challenged:

Writers increasingly appealed to the experience of the traveller as a source of authority for the truthfulness of particular observations concerning human diversity. And yet the traveller’s experience was complex and his authority questionable. It is therefore very important to understand properly what was actually involved in the process of observing and describing a non-European society.⁹²

When Europeans described other countries or peoples, they were presented only in terms of difference from their positions, portraying these differences as ‘strange.’ Edward Said mentions that:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity, a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.⁹³

Thus the missionaries contributed to the activity of image-making, presenting the ‘savage’ to the civilized world as a being in need of deliverance. The accounts produced by missionaries become even more questionable, when we consider that missionaries had to write specifically to cater to the interests of their sponsors and the Board at home. Their accounts were important as

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp 62-63.

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ Joan-Pau Rubies, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India Through European Eyes, 1250-1625*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. xii-xiii.

⁹² Ibid., p. xiii.

⁹³ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin 1995, p. 1.

the only link between them and the home **mission**, and while taking care not to **give too fantastic** reports, they manipulated the situation by **presenting the native population as desperately** needing missionary intervention and redemption.

Re/Presenting the Noble Savage

Nicholas Thomas opines that while **missionaries** seem quaint, absurdly **pious** and intolerant from the perspective of today's **self-consciously secular western societies**, it is important to recall that "they had not just a **considerable** impact on some colonized **societies**, but also a tremendous influence on perceptions **at home** of places such as the Pacific islands."⁹⁴ He continues that even if missionary visions and **ideas** were often not accepted, they were **certainly** widely circulated through cheap periodicals, **books** and photographic media. One of the central features of the missionary propaganda, **Thomas says**, was the narrative of conversion, which contrasted former savagery with a subsequently **elevated** and purified Christian state. He notes:

Narratives concerning particular mission 'fields' **tended to dramatize** one or two key practices with which the state of savagery or heathenism was identified: **cannibalism**, widow-strangling (in Fiji) or **sati** (in India). In the Western Solomons, headhunting **was rendered emblematic**, as it was in **some official** literature and in traveller's accounts...the viewer [or reader] is not supposed to be titillated by the **actuality** of these horrific practices, but is instead interested in the work that is being done or has **been done** to abolish them. The missionary representation thus **entails temporal** marking and tends to convey a narrative of barbarism as past, rather than as immediate and **persisting** condition.⁹⁵

Furthermore, he emphasizes that the mission discourse **must** simultaneously emphasize **savagery** and signal the essential humanity, and more positive **features** of the people to be evangelized, because 'if the savages are quintessentially and **irreducibly** savage, the project of **converting** them to Christianity and introducing civilization is **both hopeless** and worthless.'⁹⁶ Thus in missionary literatures we find the before-after story, **which** contrasts the horrors of the past with the happiness of the Christian present.

David Zou Vumlallian also notes that the often repeated term *savage* in the language of the missionary registers a kind of change in its connotation over time. He says:

While the negative and malicious association of the term gives way to a new loveable and hopeful connotation in its later usage, phrases like 'savage tribes' or 'wild races' continue to thrive in the

⁹⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, London: Polity, 1994, p. 126.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

missionary records. The possibility of reforming the 'savage' is always admitted, but the difference between the white missionary him/herself and the reformed native had been sometimes maintained.⁹⁷

The possibility of the savage to become a subject for conversion is discussed at length by Rev. E. G. Phillips in the Jubilee report:

But the savages and demon-worshipers have their redeeming features, when viewed from a missionary standpoint. They are virgin soil, not waste land, full of the roots and seeds of Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Mohammedanism, land which must be first cleared, and in which you will expect to see the evil plants constantly re-appearing. Sow the true seed abundantly and prayerfully, and expect without fail to reap abundantly and speedily.⁹⁸

The spirit of independence among the natives, once frowned upon, is actually seen as an asset when brought under the influence of Christianity:

They are independent spirited, free of caste. From untold generations they have recognized none as their masters. A form of slavery has existed among them, but in spirit they are independent. This spirit of independence, when brought under the sway of the Cross, is immensely superior to the cringing spirit that is the child of religious caste. It gives itself readily to independence of Church work and action.⁹⁹

To magnify the goodness of the Christianized savage, comparisons are drawn between the natives of other established religions and thus, we see that the characteristics which earned the native notoriety among the missionaries now act as their finest redeeming points.

In the history of colonization, the comparison between the savages who can be subjugated and those who refuse to be dominated has generated several discourses within colonial discourse, which include the discourse of the civilized other and the discourse of savagery.¹⁰⁰ Peter Hulme shows how, within one geographical area, the division civilised/savage was made by Europeans between Arawak and Carib, and the Carib were associated with cannibalism, since they resisted colonial rule.¹⁰¹

Instances from *A Corner in India* testifies that the natives were always seen in the light of potential converts to Christianity and this is more evident in Mrs Clark's comment that "The

⁹⁷ David Zou Vumlallian, "Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on Northeast India", *Religion and Society*, pp. 74-75.

⁹⁸ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, n. 64, p. 78.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*, n.40, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Nagas once civilized and Christianized, will make a manly, worthy people,”¹⁰² she was looking at the natives as possible converts, and looking at them as potential Christians. The realisation of her ideal *Christian* native personifies itself in the figure of Imrong, a convert in the village. In November 1880, Rev. C. D. King of the Assam mission visited the Clarks in Molung and he wrote of Imrong:

At heart Imrong may not have been more devoted to the cause of Christ, or in his life more faithful or truer than some of the other Christian Nagas; but he had the fervor, the zeal, the enthusiasm many seemed to lack and which we so longed to see in this people. I thought him the homeliest man in the village, very tall, very muscular, square-shouldered, angular, loose-jointed, and such hands and feet!...I could truly say, “I loved him like a brother.”¹⁰³

This description of the Christianized gentle savage to the “strange, uncivilized men” in the beginning of Mrs. Clark’s narration offers us a contrasting picture, which perfectly attests to the before-after story. The savage has finally become a full entity with a name and an identity, and here the ‘stalwart, robust’ warriors have been rendered ‘homely’ by Christianity.

Because of their ambition to bring the natives under Christianity, they always strived to find some redeeming aspects in their ‘degrading’ ways, so as to justify themselves and their mission:

Amid these exhibitions of taste so degrading and repulsive we observe with encouragement and delight the slightest evidence of some innate refinement. Men as well as women and children are often seen coming from the jungle or from the day’s work with pretty, delicate wild flowers, or even a twig of fresh green drawn through the orifice in the air.¹⁰⁴

Mary Clark narrates an incident about deaths in two families in the village. She illustrates plainly to show how degrading and wild the funeral a ritual of a heathen warrior was, compared to the funeral of a child from a Christian family. This can be plainly located as a discourse of the civilized other *vis-à-vis* the discourse of savagery. In her own words:

For several succeeding days, fantastically arranged in front of the late residence of the dead, were all his household possessions, and his war regalia, conspicuous among which was the shield of buffalo hide embellished with grotesque figures in white paint made of the calcined skulls of pigs...Just across the way, in striking contrast with the above, there lay in a Christian home the silent form of a much-loved child. A few flowers placed at the head seemed especially, in this time of dense darkness, to shed a ray of light and a gleam of hope. As we tried to offer sympathy to the sorrowing ones the Christian father replied, “It is our heavenly Father who has taken from us our precious child.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 45.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

Even the Christian village is held up as a model village in an idyllic setting. Mary Clark quotes their visitor, Rev. King, gave an enthusiastic report of the Clarks' mission in the hills:

Among such people as this, it is a matter of no small encouragement to see even one Christian church and one nominally Christian village, keeping the Sabbath and holding itself aloof from all the petty wars that rage about it; a village which, without skulls or other warlike distinctions, compels the respect of others because it is Christian. Such is this village of Molung. It is literally a city set on a hill, and we are having just now ample proof that it cannot be hid.¹⁰⁶

Already we can see an enforcement of distinction between the villages taking place, where the Christian village is literally put up as an epitome of Christian piety and virtue. This present Christian village was a far cry from the condition of life in the dark past as "there was, at that time, no security of property or life."¹⁰⁷

From the account of Mary Clark, we are given a depiction of how "the young colony grew and prospered," and this persuaded families from other villages to join the new Christian village. Unlike the initial hostility of the people towards the new religion before, Christianity was gaining in popularity among the people and in Mrs. Clark's words, "other villages, seeing our prosperity, began asking for teachers..."¹⁰⁸

During this time of great change in the Hills, David Zou Vumlallian says that "Representations of hill men as the savage headhunter were gradually replaced by images of sainthood and soul hunters."¹⁰⁹ The manner in which the Nagas adjusted themselves to the changes in their surroundings and their new way of life is related by Mary Clark with amusement, like an indulgent parent towards her children:

The adjustment of the Nagas to these advanced accommodations was amusing. Some of the men looked for a moment, then steeped 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; then some sat down properly, others put their children on the seats while they themselves sat on the floor in front. Soon, however, all accommodated themselves to the new arrangement with no little merriment and with much appreciation.¹¹⁰

The once fearsome and warlike Nagas, dubbed as 'headhunters' slowly experienced the loss of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁰⁹ David Zou Vumlallian, "Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on Northeast India", n.97, p. 79.

¹¹⁰ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, p. 83.

their identity and their headhunting days became a thing of the past with Christianity. Here the image presented by the missionary of the civilised *savage* is completely unrecognizable from the proud warrior of earlier representations. They are almost childlike, bereft of all their identity-markers, and the realization that they are not invincible is a devastating revelation. Mary Mead wrote in her journal:

You can hardly realize how civilized, comparatively, our Nagas are becoming...You should hear their exclamations of wonder as they turn the pages of "Harper's Weekly"! They are in a new world of which they never dreamed. When our new missionary map from Boston was hung up before them, "Wah!wah!wah! father, what does it speak?" uttered in reverent exclamations gave opportunity for such a lesson as led old Deacon Scubungallumba to drop his head and mutter almost under his breath, "Ish, Ish! How great we have thought ourselves, as though we were the big part of all creation."¹¹

At once with their contact with Christianity, the Nagas got their first glimpse of the outside world and it resulted in a toppling of all their age-old beliefs and convictions. The entire order of their universe became questionable and they had to reconcile themselves to the fact that they were merely a small part of the earth. The savage was no longer presented as a threatening figure but rather as a helpless and pitiable soul in need of redemption. Mrs. Clark during her initial days in the Hills remarked of the heathen Naga savage that, "A casual observer would never imagine the ambition for fame and glory that lurks in the Naga's breast. He is ready to sacrifice to the utmost that his praises may be sung and his name perpetuated."¹² Perhaps this can be contrasted with the almost pathetic representation of the now *civilised* Nagas, stripped of their ambition for greatness and instead subjected to the greatness of a superior people. Mary Clark jubilates in this change, as the mission has succeeded in taming these difficult people:

We never can 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 who did not wish to be outdone; their honest pride spoke volumes...¹³

Thus, missionary literature provides a key to the politics of representation and how the image of the savage was gradually modified by the missionaries to accommodate the discourse of the success of mission fields among heathen tribes. Nicholas Thomas is of the view that the social process of conversion and the development of a new Christian society are represented as a dyadic affair. He invokes an image of the missionaries on one side showing the light and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 108.

¹² Ibid., p. 46.

¹³ Ibid., p. 109.

providing guidance, while on the other side the natives respond to the dawn and happily learn and work within the new order.¹¹⁴ This situation aptly sums up the missionary representation of the conversion in the Naga Hills, but it would be amiss of any observer today to assume that conversion was merely along religious lines. Conversion was the determining factor which affected all aspects of Naga life; it was the total imposition of an all-new order of things and in such circumstances the before-after story was not simply about portraying the happy new state of things but it also implicated an entire history of untold events.

Mary Clark's brush with adventure did not end after she left the Naga Hills for good in 1901, but continued during the journey when "Less than half-day's journey from Calcutta, in the treacherous Hoogly, our steamer suddenly lurched, and from our submerged cabin it was with great difficulty that I was rescued."¹¹⁵ She resumed the journey aboard the "P. and O.," which took them till England without any mishap. The narrative ends with the feeling of apparent relief on finally reaching America:

Then just a little "run across," and home, home, home! If you want to know the meaning of that dear word be a missionary.¹¹⁶

A Corner in India as an account from the centre about a subjugated people is a valuable text, not only because it echoes the spirit of colonialism at its heydays, but also because it is documented by a woman. It becomes a study in how a woman writer in the later part of the nineteenth century had to shape her work according to the conventions of the genre and the readership. It also throws an interesting light on the participation of women in the 'missionary zeal' taking place on a parallel plane with active imperial colonization.

In conclusion, as Sara Mills argues, women were indeed actively involved in colonialism, and they wrote about the colonial situation too. She asserts that given the quantity of writing produced by women during the colonial period, such work has been widely ignored. Women feature largely in the colonial enterprise as potent objects of purity and symbols of home, their writing, Mills says, is not taken seriously in the same way that male Orientalist writing has been

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, n. 94, 1994, pp. 139-40.

¹¹⁵ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, n. 4, pp. 160-61

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

received.¹¹⁷ Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India*, while written by a woman, abounds in Orientalist politics when read as a missionary's travel account, and proves that the discourse of the Other is never a gendered discourse.

¹¹⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, n. 24, p. 58.

Chapter 3

**Rereading *The Star of the Naga hills*: Private Letters of
the Rivenburgs**

CHAPTER 3

Rereading *The Star of the Naga Hills: Private Letters of the Rivenburgs*

This chapter is an attempt to evaluate the collection of letters written by Rev. Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg, missionaries to the Naga Hills in Assam. Their letters bear testimony to the hard lives of the pioneering missionaries in Kohima among the Angami Nagas, evangelising the natives with the Bible and western medical skills. These collections of letters are not only indicators of the colonial spirit of the times they lived in, but speak about personal loss and sacrifice in an alien location. It will not be possible to evaluate the letters together, for the experience articulated by them varies because of the very fact that these are separate experiences of husband and wife, male and female. Indira Ghose contends that travel writing remained a firmly male-dominated preserve until the nineteenth century and although women have written accounts of their travels as early as the Middle Ages, the genre as a whole remained largely in the hands of male writers, sustaining its connotations of male adventure, exploration and escape.¹ To look at the letters as a homogenised expression would be to simplistically generalise multiple experiences and undercut the depth of their implications. Thus the chapter will regard the letters as two set of experiences, and will evaluate them separately as two distinct discourses, erecting a line of difference between Sidney's letters and Hattie's letters.

Rev. Sidney Rivenburg, M.D., was a missionary in the Naga Hills, India for forty-two years (1883-1923) working among the Nagas with sincere and earnest dedication. The information concerning his life prior to his taking up missionary duties are documented in the Foreword to *The Star of the Naga Hills* by his brother Romeyn H. Rivenburg. Sidney Rivenburg graduated from Keystone Academy and then studied for two years at Bucknell University, moving on to graduate from Brown University. Thereafter he graduated from the Rochester Theological Seminary and was appointed to Assam by the American Baptist Missionary Union in 1883. Realising the importance of medical skills for an outstation missionary, Rivenburg joined the Baltimore Medical College during his first furlough to America and graduated with a degree in medicine. Sidney Rivenburg was decorated by the Government of India in 1922 with the Kaiser-

¹ Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 1-2.

i-Hind (Sovereign of India) medal for meritorious service, “granted by the British ruler to civilians in recognition of their services to the people of India”.²

As evident from their accounts written to friends and family in America, the Rivenburgs stand out as paragons exemplifying the dedication of pioneer missionaries in overseas missions. Viewed in a different light away from the studies in recent scholarship that generalizes missionaries as deeply involved in the colonial agenda along with the imperial powers, the contribution of the Rivenburgs to the Nagas was highly valuable, justly earning him the loving label from the natives, “The Star of the Naga Hills”. Their letters pieced together tell a poignant and moving story of a couple’s selfless work for a people, if only to Christianise them.

Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg were appointed to Assam by the American Baptist Missionary Union in 1883 to fill in for Dr. E. W. Clark, the missionary in the Ao area of the Naga Hills during his furlough. After staying for a year in Sibsagar studying the language of the natives, they moved on to the Ao Naga area. On the return of the Clarks to the hills two years later, the Rivenburgs were transferred to Kohima, which was a military post of the British Government. In Kohima, the couple had to learn the Angami language since it was very important to reach out to the natives through the medium of their own language. After five years of ministry in Kohima, they returned to America for a furlough. Sidney took advantage of this time to earn a degree in medicine and thus equipped with knowledge of medicine, they traveled back to Kohima after two years, equipped to heal bodies and souls.

Edited by their daughter Narola Rivenburg in 1941, *The Star of the Naga Hills* is a collection of letters written by Sidney and Hattie Rivenburg from the Naga Hills to their relatives at home. The very act of collecting the letters and editing them for the benefit of the readers is a precursor of the “Raj Revival”, when the British media released feature films, television programme, and documentaries on India under the British rule, a flowering that Salman Rushdie coined as the “Raj Revival”.³ The “Raj Revival” is a reference to the sentiment that despite their mistakes, the

² Narola Rivenburg, ed, *The Star of the Naga Hills*, Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1941, p. 137.

³ Salman Rushdie, “The Raj Revival,” *The Observer* (April 1, 1984), p. 19; Also quoted by Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, “Gender and Colonialism: Women’s Organization Under the Raj,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 8 (1985), p. 521.

British performed a valuable service in ruling India because of the backwardness of its people.⁴ It involved a zeroing down on people with “lesser religions” on the part of the missionaries and winning native converts for the expansion of Christianity. However such a revival has serious implications for the erstwhile colonised nations, for it results in evoking “colonial nostalgia” and the establishment of “hegemonic positions”:

Reading about or watching film images of Europeans in colonial settings is one way for white people in both the United States and Britain to expand their horizons beyond the narrow borders of their own societies. Unfortunately, colonial nostalgia about Africa, India, or the Middle East typically lacks a historical and specific understanding of the colonial context, central to which was the exploitation of indigenous peoples: the racism of imperialism. “Seeing the world” (and “the other”) through colonial nostalgia in no way challenges white European and North American viewers’ and readers’ hegemonic position in today’s world.⁵

The letters cover a period of almost forty years, from the beginning of the journey till the return to America. As Narola Rivenburg, the daughter of Sidney and Hattie writes in the Preface:

Curiously, lovingly, and somewhat tearfully I read these letters written so long ago by two brave young people as they answered the Master’s call to preach the good news to the uttermost parts of the earth. Surely no farther “uttermost” could be found than among the headhunters of the Naga Hills of Assam, India.⁶

Indeed, undertaking such a long journey to distant parts of the “unknown” world posed an emotional challenge to the missionaries. In most cases, the journeys stretched to months, resulting in the consequent perception of “distant lands”, “uttermost parts of the earth”, far removed from civilisation. The sense of remoteness of overseas missions from the homeland was very strongly felt, leading to often emotional departures from friends and family at home. In Hattie’s letter to her friend Nettie, she takes out an extract from her mother’s letter to convey to her friend the inner turmoil she felt at leaving her family:

Poor Mother! She writes: “If you sailed Saturday, as you expected, you must be very far from me when you read this—how far I dare not stop to think. I hope it is for the best. If you are happy, I shall try to be reconciled. It seems to me that I would give all I have in the world to know just where you are and how you feel in mind and body...” Is that not a brave letter from my widowed mother? I know my sister will take good care of her, but I cannot think of her sad face without tears. I do wonder if I should have left her!⁷

⁴ Ibid. Also See Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, “Gender and Colonialism: Women’s Organization under the Raj”, n. 3, p. 521.

⁵ Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p.15.

⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

The Rivenburgs sailed on October, 1883 aboard the S. S. Furnesia to London as the **natural** transit point, following the itinerary of other missionaries who sailed from Boston or New York to “other” parts of the world. London city was the **marker** of the end of the transatlantic stretch, and its attraction as the metropolis of empire went **beyond** its mere geographical convenience as a transit point. It also commanded a special attraction for **the** North American missionaries, many of whom had never ventured beyond America. ⁸In **Sidney** Rivenburg’s letter to home, he describes the stopover in London, though not in the **usual** mien of an enthusiastic traveller describing the sights, but in terms of interaction with **fellow** missionaries:

In company with Mr. Burdette, the Witters, and Miss. **Johnson**, we went the usual sightseeing rounds in London. On Sunday we heard the Reverend Joseph **Parker** and Charles H. Spurgeon. We also **called** on Mrs. O. T. Cutter, one of the first missionaries to Assam, **who** went out in 1835.⁹

By the 1870’s, the number of missionaries **halting** in the port towns awaiting ships to go to different parts of Asia and Africa was sizable enough to **constitute** a transit community. This community of travellers in transit, brought together in a **common** cause for a brief period of time, had a fascinating dynamic of its own. It enabled **active** missionaries to gain easy access and network with each other. ¹⁰The Rivenburgs were not **alone** in their voyage but were **accompanied** by the Witters, Mr. Burdette and Miss. Johnson, all **fellow** missionaries traveling to Assam from America. The party resumed the rest of the journey to **India** and anchored at Madras, then travelled from Madras to Calcutta and then finally on to **Assam**.

Rereading Hattie’s Letters

Indira Ghose examines the location of Western **women** in colonialism, arguing that **while** women’s travel writing contested a form of gender **power** for women, the distancing effect produced by humanist/empiricist principles of vision **situated** women as spectators of empire and effaced their implication in the specificity of colonial **power**. The gaze, according to her, “constructs itself as absent from the site of observation **while** **simultaneously** serving the function of surveillance over the other”.¹¹ She adds that by **producing** knowledge about the other and

⁸ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860’s-1940’s)*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 2000, p. 83.

⁹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n.2, p. 23.

¹⁰ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860’s-1940’s)*, n. 8, p. 83.

¹¹ Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, n.1, p. 9.

circulating colonial stereotypes, travel writing is implicated in the reproduction of colonialism, and women by all means participated in this:

By colluding in the myth of women's non-involvement in colonialism, we are denying precisely those women agency who rightly earn our admiration by shaping their own lives by traveling!...by constructing women as not involved in empire we support masculinist historiography that marginalizes women.¹²

Women Orientalist travellers contested for gender power by producing Orientalist knowledge in their texts, but nevertheless remained excluded from the field of scholarly Orientalist research. At the same time their texts were informed by the discourses of Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism, which evinced a deep contempt towards everything Indian and laid the foundations for the ideology of the 'white man's burden' and mission to carry civilization to the empire.¹³ The activity of traveling for women also gives rise to questions of gender power for women. By entering the public world of travel, women transgressed gender norms that relegated them to the home, at the same time their autobiographical writings gave them further access to the public sphere and helped them shape an autonomous female identity.¹⁴

The young women who came with their missionary husbands had a double role to play out, not only as the memsahibs but also as the helpmeets for their husbands in so many ways. Missionary wives who accompanied their husbands on overseas missions to "distant lands" were generally young women from small-town America, without any experience of the world other than the towns where they were born and brought up. Far from their "civilised" homes, they bore and raised children and lived away from home for many subsequent years, taking a furlough whenever health problems persisted. Most of these young women suffered the pain of familial separation, cultural displacement and also of new roles and responsibilities for which their limited exposure and education had hardly equipped them. Issues of cultural displacement and the pain of family separations haunted the lives of many as they poured their hearts out in letters home, which took months to reach their destinations. Many missionary families lived far removed from townships and therefore did not have easy access medical facilities and consumer goods available to other members of the resident European community in urban India.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

Hattie Tiffany married Sidney Rivenburg under **much** romantic circumstances, as is **evidenced** by her letter to her friend Nettie:

...I had promised to become the wife of Sidney **Rivenburg**, missionary to India! I told him I **had been** waiting three years for him. I know you will **question the veracity** of this Christian woman's **statement** when you remember Sam, Mr. Jones and others with **whom** I was often seen, but just then, with **Sidney's** arms around me, I thought I was telling the truth **and that** he was the one for whom I **had been waiting** without knowing it.¹⁶

The deeply in love couple got married in 1883, **immediately** before Sidney had to leave for India, following his appointment as a missionary to Assam. It was a whirlwind affair for the young bride as she confided in her letter:

It was a pretty short time in which to prepare for a **life across** the ocean, so we decided to have a **very quiet** wedding...we were married at five o'clock in the **afternoon**. We took the 7:30 train for Scranton to **attend** the farewell meetings. I was forced to sit on the platform, **and, after meeting**, to shake hands with **everyone**. So many said to me, "You look so young, how can your **mother** let you go?"¹⁷

Indeed setting out to the distant shores of India from **the closed** confines of home and family was a gigantic step for a small-town girl but Hattie was **undaunted** by the enormous change in her life. It was a sacrifice of love for her husband, a man **who** had pledged his life to working in the overseas mission. With all the naiveté of a young **woman** who had no idea about how difficult life in a mission field could be, she wrote thus:

I was not particularly interested in saving any heathen, **here or elsewhere**, but rather was very **much in love** with a certain young man. I did not much care what **he did** or where he went as long as I **might go along** with him. I could have lived with him in America or **gone to Timbuktoo**—it was all the same to me.¹⁸

On their arrival in Assam, the Rivenburgs could not **proceed** immediately to the Naga Hills to relieve the Clarks for their furlough. This was due **some** dispute between the natives and the British government, leading to a tense and high-strung **situation** in the area. During such a time, the arrival of foreigners could be greeted with hostility **by the natives** and might further **intensify** the situation. Hence no one was allowed to enter the **danger** zone from the British possessions without a permit, on penalty of a heavy fine.¹⁹ As a **result**, the Rivenburgs were refused entry into the Naga Hills and they had to remain in Sibsagar **for one year**, doubling up in a bungalow

¹⁶ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n.2, p. 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 21-22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

with the Witters.

Lettering the Other

Their halt in Sibsagar for a period of one year proved beneficial in many ways as they tried to learn the local language and acquaint themselves with the natives of Sibsagar, a majority of who were Hindus. Hattie's letters during this time are an interesting pointer to how the 'other' was produced as a textual construction, an interpretation of reality. In the convention of Western travel writing, the letters participate in the circulation of stereotypes and images of the other while at the same time participating in the production of knowledge and the dissemination of the effects of power.²⁰ Moreover, the letters served to satisfy the curiosity of the readers at home as narratives describing the new and the strange ways of life.

Hattie begins her March 17th, 1884 letter to her mother and sister saying, "You ask about our servants" and goes on to write a lengthy letter about the Hindu caste system and the evils of the Hindu religion. The entire letter is written from a missionary point of view, where conversion to Christianity is the final desired outcome to remedy all the ills of Hinduism. She writes, "every man belongs to a caste or class in the Hindu system; each of which has its own rules of conduct laid down by religion and custom".²¹ Western perceptions about the rigidity of the Hindu caste consciousness are communicated through the following portrayal in her letter:

The people in Sibsagar are mostly of the Hindu religion. As I said, they are all divided into castes, the highest being the Brahmin, the lowest, the Sudra. Then there are thousands of outcastes who are Hindus, but are virtually slaves to the caste people...Just the other day, when we were out walking, we passed a bullock-cart driver who had just emptied his rice out of his pot to eat. Mr. Witter touched the outside of the pot, whereupon the man immediately threw the rice for the day into the jungle. Even the shadow of a foreigner or other caste man must not fall on the food if it is to be eaten.²²

Then she expresses the futility of such customs by comparing it to the way of life in America, posing the question, "I wonder how many Americans would so cheerfully give up a day's food supply for some religious principle".²³ This intrinsically marks out the indivisible difference between the people of the east and the west, where the orientals are seen to be blindly following some obsolete dogmas of religion.

²⁰ Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, n.1, p. 2.

²¹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n.2, p. 32.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Hattie Rivenburg's main concern in **her letter** is the exhibition of the **Indian caste system** to her readers and it occupies the entire **subject** of the letter. Here, her definition of the 'other' is solely on the peculiarities of the caste **society** as seen through her eyes. There is an **underlying** suggestion that her India is only **about castes**, since this issue is the main focus of **her observation** which she transmits to America. She **continues**:

Only the upper castes may read or **hear their** sacred scriptures. Some years ago, when the native **rajah** ruled Sibsagar, if a Sudra or lower caste **was caught** listening to the Vedas being read, **hot lead was poured** into his ears. A dying Hindu is taken **outside the house**, otherwise the building must be torn down at once.²⁴

In this case, local hearsay reinvents **itself** as pure facts when presented by a **Western observer**. Ronald Inden has pointed to the **hierarchical** relationship between the **knowledge of the** Orientalist scholar and his/her **object of knowledge**, the Oriental.²⁵ This leads us to Gayatri Spivak, who says that the Oriental is **consistently denied** the power to represent him or herself, implying that the Oriental other is **also denied** the power to produce and transform his or her own world, not just to adapt to it. By **denying** agency to the Oriental **object of knowledge**, the Western Orientalist subject **appropriates** it for him or herself. As a consequence, **the image** of India constructed in Orientalist **discourse** is one of a mythical irrationality.²⁶ This construction had already entrenched itself deeply in the Western mind, when Hattie recounts with an **amused** note in 1884:

The Hindus have a number of **feasts during** the year. Last Wednesday they commenced by **throwing mud** at each other like schoolboys. At a **given signal** they all stopped to go to the river to bathe, **after which** they threw red powder all over themselves...Of course, all of their actions have what is to them **symbolic** religious significance.

She returns to the subject of the **Hindu feasts** in the same correspondence, **opining** that "The Juggernaut Festival is most spectacular" and furthermore explains the horrific quality of the customs related to this festival:

It used to be customary for the worshipers who wished to atone for sin to throw **themselves under the heavy** wheels of the car to be crushed to death. But now this form of suicide is prohibited by **the British** government.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁵ Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1986, pp. 401-46.

²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Studies*, New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 209.

²⁷ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n.2, pp. 35-36.

The picture of India as deeply religious, governed by irrational religious principles was in fact corroborated by the British ruling class, since by supporting the Brahmanical discourse they helped to stabilize and strengthen this already powerful elite caste. Acts such as these served to bolster the Orientalist image of India as deeply religious, traditional and unchanging. But recent scholarship argues that:

Traditional India was not a rigid society. It was British rule which made it so, codifying many localised and pragmatic customs into a unified and Brahminised 'Hindoo Law' and classing people into immutable castes through the operation of the courts and ethnographic surveys.²⁸

For Hattie, the experience she had in India was conditioned by the ongoing Orientalist discourses circulating about the Orient at the time, and it roused her missionary fervor to provide Christianity as a saving grace to the natives. A marked contrast from the young lady who confided to her friend at the beginning of her voyage "I was not particularly interested in saving any heathen, here or elsewhere..." Hattie's attitude changed to the earnest missionary desire of saving the heathens:

It is dreadful to know what and how they worship. I do not believe a Christian could stay here without a longing to make conditions better.²⁹

The mission spirit was no doubt growing in Hattie, and with great enthusiasm she confessed in her letter that she took the long voyage to India because of the man she married, but she found herself "fast becoming interested in the lives of the people" and had "grown anxious to feel I have saved some soul".³⁰

A Woman Traveller in the Zenana

Putting forward the query of what the women 'Orientalist' travellers stake was in contributing to the discourses of Orientalism, Ghose argues that women travellers sought access to Orientalism as a strategy to negotiate a form of gender power and to contest male dominance in scientific and scholarly modes of writing.³¹

²⁸ C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 156.

²⁹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n.2, p. 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³¹ Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, n.1, p. 27.

Women travellers, which included the missionaries, sought to penetrate into the zenana or the female quarters of upper caste Hindu women. However, in the case of the women missionaries, it was less of an issue about gender power and more of a desire to convert the upper caste women. For this, the evils of the Hindu religion especially for a female were constantly detailed for their audiences. When Hattie wrote to her mother and sister, she lamented about the miserable conditions of Hindu women:

Hindu girls are married when they are a year old, although they usually stay with their parents until they are older. Meanwhile, if their husbands should die, these girls are not allowed to remarry. Their jewels are torn out of their ears, and from their hands and ankles, and they are often treated with great cruelty. They are thought to be in some way responsible for the death of their husbands.³²

Like most of their Anglo-American secular contemporaries as well as many prominent Hindu social reformers, missionaries also criticised the position of Hindu widows, focusing on the customs of high-caste Hindus, most of which strongly encouraged celibacy for all widows.³³

Women from the so-called “civilised” countries responded to the plight of the downtrodden Hindu women by writing about their conditions, thus contributing to the image of the Indian woman while at the same time constructing this image. The ‘Indian women’s question’ took on the mantle of a political issue, with reformers clamoring for a radical transformation of Indian society.³⁴ Missionaries responded to this call by undertaking the task of elevating the wretched status of the Indian woman, with conversion as the final and ultimate motive. Thus in missionary correspondences, we can find numerous references to the Indian woman’s plight. In this same vein, Hattie Rivenburg records a Hindu marriage ceremony, remarking that:

If for any reason after marriage the husband becomes tired of his wife, he may tell her to go to her father’s house, in which case she is divorced and becomes a despised slave.³⁵

The commitment of missionaries to bring about substantial change in the social norms effecting Indian women was often couched in a rhetoric that stressed women’s low status in Indian

³² Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 37.

³³ Leslie A. Flemming, “A New Humanity: American Missionaries’ Ideals for Women in North India, 1870-1930”, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, n. 5, p. 194.

³⁴ Antoinette M. Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and ‘The Indian Woman’, 1865-1915”, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, n. 5, pp. 137-57.

³⁵ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 37.

society. 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, then common among all religious communities in India, as the area of social life most in need of change.³⁶

During the Rivenburgs stop at Sibsagar for one year, they came into contact with Benudhor, a Brahmin pandit. Consequently, Hattie never gave up her attempts at trying to convert him and his family, seeing it as an added asset to the Mission if they managed to convert a person of a high caste. She expressed this wish in her letter:

After Benudhor has been talking to me of his religion, I long to save his soul. I do wish he might come to know our Christ. He has read the New Testament through twice. Will you pray for him?³⁷

Since Benudhor's wife was in purdah, only Hattie could gain access to their home and it is evident that a sort of friendship was cultivated by her with the wife:

...I have been visiting in the home of Benudhor. His wife loves to learn new things. Just now she is busy, under my direction, making slippers for her husband. The last time I went, I took a book of Bible stories in Assamese. How I hope and pray that they may hear and believe! Since Benudhor is an influential Brahmin, it would be very difficult for him to become a Christian.³⁸

As much as Hattie is concerned with the wife and for all the semblance of friendship, she never mentions her by name in the letters, instead referring to her as 'Benudhor's wife'. This woman who visits her and who she visits remains bereft of an identity in Hattie's perception apart from being an influential Brahmin's wife that she longs to convert. Thus there is no intimacy of friendship between them but only a clear hierarchy between a superior and inferior religion. But clearly Hattie exploits the aura of mystery linked to the purdah, opening it for the benefit of her readers' curiosities:

Last evening Benudhor's wife came to see me. Inasmuch as she is a purdah or veiled woman, Sidney had to leave for parts unknown. I drew the curtains in so that no curious male eyes might look in. She is never allowed to go out in the daytime.³⁹

³⁶ Leslie A. Flemming, "A New Humanity: American Missionaries' Ideals for Women in North India, 1870-1930", n. 33, p. 194.

³⁷ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 37.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Then she goes on to present a **picture** of the woman behind the veil, **reveling in the fact that she** was privileged to see into the **purdah** and could transmit what she saw to her **civilised readers** at home:

To prevent anyone from seeing **her** even after dark, a servant walked in front of **her**, carrying a big round shield some four feet across. **She wore** a white satin skirt and a thin sari. **Her three children** wore silks and lots of jewelery...The wife and **her friend** were heavily veiled. They had **the most fascinating way** of flirting those veils when they **wanted** to peek at something, but they always remembered to let them fall over the face as soon as a **manservant** drew near.⁴⁰

For missionary women travellers, **apart** from their involvement in promoting **the cause of female** education and dispensing **medical care** to the natives, a third activity involved **the zenana** visiting, usually carried out by **married** women. It meant regularly visiting secluded upper-caste women confined to the women's **quarters** of the houses. The objects of these visits were unabashedly evangelistic and they **taught** Bible stories, prayed, and sang religious songs, refusing to visit any houses where **these** activities were forbidden or restricted.⁴¹ This production of knowledge about the zenana or **the women's quarters** was the **sole field of research** for women travellers taken seriously by male scholars, at the same time providing a site for **the projection** of (male and female) fantasies.⁴²

Impeccable Homemaker and God's Representative

The Rivenburgs were finally **given the go-ahead** by the British government to **advance to** the Hills in January 1885. They were to **join Mr. Clark** at Molung and to **relieve him of his duties** while he went to America for a furlough.

A missionary wife who was **embarking on a journey overseas** in the 1860's like in the case of Hattie Rivenburg was positioned very **differently** from her husband who was **the designated** representative of his missionary society. She was altogether absent from **mission records** of personnel and classified as a "**family dependent**", although she contributed a lot in the field. A wife was bound by the gendered notions of her role as helpmeet to her husband **thus expected to** shoulder the domestic duties of a wife and the religious duties of an evangelist. Church

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴¹ Leslie A. Flemming, "A New Humanity: American Missionaries' Ideals for Women in North India, 1870-1930", n. 33, pp. 193-94.

⁴² Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, n.1, p. 11.

patriarchies dictated that since she was fulfilling the role of a Biblical ‘helpmeet’, evangelical work was to be an extension of a woman’s obligations in marrying a missionary.⁴³

In the 1886 Jubilee conference of the American Baptist Missionary Union in Nowgong, Assam, Mrs. E. G. Phillips talks about “The Work for Missionaries Wives” in her paper. She states that the duty of a missionary wife is not only to aid her husband in converting the heathens, but also to take care of the health of her own family and practice frugality in household expenses to avoid unnecessary expenditure for the Missionary Union:

He [the missionary] is sometimes detained from tours on account of the illness of some of his family. How can we as wives avoid this drawback? If we look well to the ways of our households, and provide those things needful for the physical comfort of the little ones which God may have given us, can we not in a great measure prevent many of those illnesses, which are a drawback to the husband and father?⁴⁴

Moreover, she exhorts that missionary wives should come prepared to give up the pleasures and comforts of home, since life in the frontier entailed hard work:

Many missionaries’ wives come out with the idea that they are no longer to be troubled with household duties, they are coming to a land where Europeans are not expected to labor with their hands; native servants do all the work.⁴⁵

This attitude, she explains, results in the wives becoming weak in health, since they have been too idle to create pleasant surroundings in their rural homes and thus they begin hankering for a furlough which is a long, expensive journey.

For Hattie, the challenges of being a missionary wife were just about to begin and she had her duties laid down for her. Certain roles were assigned to her such as studying medicine, working with native women and taking care of the house. Sidney’s duties were to preach, translate, and organize the church work.

Often, giving out medical care to the natives turned out to be unpleasant affairs as Hattie recounts a tiger attack on one of the locals, terming it “One of the worst experiences we have

⁴³ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860’s-1940’s)*, n. 8, p. 79.

⁴⁴ *Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*, Guwahati: Spectrum, Rpt 1992. p. 205.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

had...soon after we came".⁴⁶ Thereafter she acquaints her mother and sister with the horrible extent to which the man had suffered from his encounter with the tiger:

Mr. Clark, an old hand at such things, turned faint and left, so Sidney and I stitched up the mailman's wounds, which were many and deep. We could see the man's lungs. I felt so sorry for the poor old thing that I even filled his pipe for him to smoke while we worked. We had no idea he could recover, but he did.⁴⁷

Sometimes, she found herself discouraged at the lack of religious progress she was facing with the women converts in the village:

I have been much disturbed about the women's not too successful prayer meeting which they hold at daylight before they go to their cultivations.⁴⁸

In addition to these duties, Hattie was involved in managing a night school and also started a prayer meeting with 'seven little girls, too shy to take part in the adult service'.⁴⁹ This shows how women as missionaries' wives submitted unquestioningly to the 'decorum' demanded by the occupation of their husbands and participated as agents of colonial reforms in the civilising missions. Another angle is that, they themselves participated in laying out high expectations which they were obliged to follow, leading to assuming for themselves the roles of impeccable homemakers in the domestic front and God's representatives in the public sphere, while all the time preserving their feminine values.

More often than the male accounts, the letters of missionary wives encompass a wide range of experiences, from personal loss to bringing up a decent family in a vastly different cultural setting. A perusal of their accounts confronts the readers with deeply personal narratives emitting a wealth of detail.

From Savages to "Instinctive Gentlemen"

An analysis of the accounts written by missionary women shows two contradictory discourses running parallel with each other in their attitudes towards the natives. On the one hand, they saw the natives as degenerate savages and maintained a difference of 'us' and 'them'

⁴⁶ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

while on the other hand they sympathised with the treatment meted out to the womenfolk and saw the Naga boys as 'instinctive gentlemen'.

Hattie Rivenburg 'adopted' a Naga baby from an unwilling mother who was going to kill the baby. Becoming attached to the baby boy, and wrote to her mother and sister that "He is growing nicely and is so dear and cunning that I could not but wish that I had a boy of my own".⁵⁰ However, she had reservations about letting the child stay in the house when she thought about the difficulties this would create, given the wide difference between their two cultures:

We do not feel that it is wise to have him in our home, for our ways of living are so different that he would be spoiled for living with his own people later on.⁵¹

From Molung, the Rivenburgs proceeded to Kohima to found a mission field and they faced the added chore of learning their third Indian language. Here at Kohima, Hattie saw and sympathised with the plight of the native women whom she thought were treated no better than servants. She ironically comments:

When going to and fro from their cultivations, the women carry the babes and loads of grain or of wood, while their lords and masters walk behind carrying a spear with which to protect them from enemies, human or animal.⁵²

However, the savages have their redeeming features even though this is noticeable only when she talks about the native Christians. As soon as they become converts and followers of the cross, they are seen in a new light by the western gaze. For instance, on talking about the native converts, Hattie remarks:

The simple faith of our Christians has put me to shame more than once. I realize that while their skins are dark their hearts are whiter than mine.⁵³

In another letter, Hattie describes a schoolroom incident that took place in Kohima:

Yesterday one of the boys in my class asked what was the meaning of the initials in Sidney's name. He decided that it must stand for southwest (S.W).⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 83.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp 99-100.

As soon as they embraced Christianity and started **attending** the mission schools, the natives ceased to be viewed as savage and dangerous without **a shred** of capacity for rational thinking. Their purity of heart and intelligence after Christianity **were** shown as examples of the mission's success in evangelising a wretched people. Far from **the** fearful image as headhunters, they became tame and courteous schoolboys:

These boys are instinctive gentlemen. If I drop a book, **several** spring to pick it up. If I suggest that there is too much wind, someone is on his feet to shut the **window or door**. They have never been taught that these are duties which ladies expect from men. They are merely **thoughtful** in little things.⁵⁵

The civilising mission carried out by the **missionaries** to bring the heathens out of their 'darkness' largely included the process of educating **them** in a classroom setting and **clothing** them according to the western style. By doing these, **they** sought to bridge the gap between barbarity and civilization, for the smooth functioning of colonial regulation and discipline, although it made the difference of the 'Other' become **more** marked. This reminds us of Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry, which he **defines** as 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*'.⁵⁶ Such a trend is evidently displayed when Hattie Rivenburg **describes** Zeo, a native convert of the Kohima mission:

You should hear him sing "There is a Happy Land" in **English**. He goes something like this: "Thar is eh hap pie lend, fer fer eh weh".⁵⁷

Another incident which did not fail to amuse her was:

The Deputy Commissioner has sent five of his Gaonburas [**village headmen**] to school. It does look funny to see these old men sitting in a row, with a wee bit of a **primer** in front of them trying to decipher the difference between "a," "b," "c".⁵⁸

Mrs. Rivenburg writes about her visit to a native's house **with** some medicine to apply on his injured back, and relates almost with revulsion the **degenerate** state of savagery in which the natives live:

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man", in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. 1998, p. 126

⁵⁷ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 98.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

A dirty child was sitting on the floor, eating out of the family pot, which was a large earthen vessel. He would reach in his hand, take a mouthful of rice, throw the rest back, dip his finger into another pot of something that looked like oil, which he sucked off greedily.⁵⁹

Even a little child was not exempt from the savagery of the heathens and the horror and disapproval of the western civilised onlooker is evidenced from the lines above. Hattie was in charge of looking after the women's spiritual well-being, and she had to make regular house calls to acquaint the womenfolk with the word of God. This is not so easy for her to do, considering the filthy conditions of the native houses. House visiting, she wrote:

It gives me a headache, probably the result of the odors of dirt in the houses. The fleas nearly drive me crazy;⁶⁰

However she quickly checks herself for her "un-missionary" attitude, and in the next lines declare:

Still I never knew it was such a joy to give, and the joy is brightened when we know the gifts cannot be returned. "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee."⁶¹

Susan Bassnett notes the subtle use of emotive language by travellers that relied upon stereotypes of savagery. The savage was an entity existing outside the world of civilization, exemplified by the Hellenic world and by Christianity.⁶² She continues that the texts produced by travellers shows how prejudices, stereotypes and negative perceptions of other cultures can be handed down through generations.⁶³

Psychological tensions run as a parallel subtext through the recorded experiences of many missionary wives. Along with their account of their evangelical work, details of their lives were vividly etched in letters to family and kin. Tensions manifested themselves at various levels such as expressions of isolation and homesickness on the one hand and a disapproval of local norms on the other.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Susan Bassnett, "Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Travellers' Tales". in Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 71.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁶⁴ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 8, p. 80.

The young woman who got **married** at twenty and sailed to India following her husband found herself pregnant after their **transfer** to the Kohima mission. Homesickness, **despair** and the possibility of dying during her **pregnancy** is profoundly articulated in a letter to her mother:

How often have I longed **for a few words of advice and sympathy from you during the past weeks**. If I should die, I hope to meet **my loved ones in Glory**.⁶⁵

Hattie and Sidney became **parents** of a baby girl and they named her 'Narola', meaning 'flower' in Ao Naga. The arrival of a **child** was both a happy occasion as well as one that would break their hearts ultimately when **the matter of her formal schooling came up**. As **parents**, the missionaries were to face a **different** set of concerns cropping up from **the questions of educating and socializing their children in a foreign land**. Home schooling was common during the **early years** but as the children grew **to be** of a school-going age, **partings were imminent**. Choosing to send children away involved **issues of race and culture and the Otherness of the culture in which the children would grow up probably generated anxieties of socialization**.⁶⁶ The Rivenburgs were compelled to take the hardest **decision** in their lives yet, as they decided to send their daughter Narola away to America in 1901. She wrote to her mother of this hard decision:

Since the Clark's were **going to America** this fall, we decided to send **Narola to Sidney's sister in Chester, Pa**. It was by all counts **the hardest thing I ever did**. Nor will I forget **Sidney's face when he kissed our child goodbye at the foot of the hills**.⁶⁷

The above lines are a revealing **testament** that the missionaries in **undertaking the journey to distant lands that would forever change the history of cultures and nations, were unable to hold on to their own families and the inevitable farewells had to be faced**.

Colonial Encounters: "Othered" by the "Others"

Settling down in Molung, Naga Hills was completely different from their life in Sibsagar, which was relatively urban compared to the hard life in the Hills. Hattie recounts a **tiger attack** on one of the locals, terming it as **"One of the worst experiences we have had...soon after we came"**.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁶ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 8, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

In her mail of April 1886 to her family in America, Hattie brings out all the gory details of the savage Naga villages at war, showing just how dangerous life in the frontier was for foreign missionaries at the mercy of these primitive and barbarous headhunters:

When one village makes an onslaught on another in this way, the conquerors carry off the heads of the men they kill...these headhunters sacrifice to the heads, calling upon their owners to invite their friends to enjoy the same fate. A few days later the flesh is burned from the heads, which are then used as ornaments for the home fence.⁶⁹

As a result of the Naga war, Mr. Greer the then Deputy Commissioner of Assam arrived with a company of native policemen in the Hills. This intervention was not unexpected by the missionaries, for in Hattie's account:

We felt sure that the British Government would punish the attacking parties, because they had previously been robbing the tea gardens, which are under British protection.⁷⁰

The arrival of the British force was a big comfort for the missionaries, as they felt their lives precariously positioned in the midst of the fierce warfare taking place. Hattie rebukes herself in her letter for taking comfort from the presence of these men rather than by believing in God:

With the sepoys camped on the compound I felt I could get a good night's sleep for the first time in weeks. Then I was ashamed that I preferred twenty weak men to the power of God and yet we had prayed that God would send peace and justice to these untamed Nagas.⁷¹

The British Empire was regarded as a force to protect them from the wild and dangerous natives. However, she points out how their presence in the village proved hazardous for the well-being of the natives, testing not only their physical health but also their religious convictions as well:

As is so often the case with military campaigns, the soldiers brought in their wake a kind of dysentery that swept through these villages like wildfire. I do not know how many of our people have died with it...The people were sure that this pestilence had come from something that they had done which angered the evil spirits. Hence, the only way they could save themselves and their loved ones was to sacrifice. Several of our church members had to be excluded after sacrificing. We have exhausted our medicines.⁷²

Working in a mission field meant that women missionaries accompanied their husbands on mission tours to different villages and they participated in itinerant evangelism. For some, this

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁷² Ibid.

involved selling tracts and singing hymns during **occasional** visits to religious fairs and pilgrimage places. For others, the primary evangelistic activity was instructing converts during periodic tours of rural areas, usually during the winter months.⁷³

Hattie's letter of 1885 written from Molung, Assam shares **with** her family the trip she and her husband undertook among the villages "to make friends of **those** to whom we are not so well known"⁷⁴. Explicit in her accounts about the dangerous **and** life-threatening incidents that occurred during the tour, it is a letter replete with all the **fears that** westerners nurture about the savages. In heathen territory, Hattie realises the drawbacks of **being** a woman crusading with the Bible among he savages.

Firstly, there is the discomfiture of camping in the jungles **and she** laments the inconveniences suffered at camp:

Our single cot occupies half of the tent, while boxes of books, **dishes, provisions, medicines, clothes, and** bedding, etc., fill the rest of the space. I am not sure I enjoy camping.⁷⁵

The trek itself was torturous and difficult due to the lack of **proper** roads and they had to march their way through "jungles so tall that they arched overhead, **and so** dense that one could see but a foot or two in front of our steps".⁷⁶ Hattie scoffs at the natives' show of feigned bravery on encountering a huge snake hanging from a branch:

One Naga said that he could have killed the snake if only it had been on the ground, while another insisted that he would have demolished it if he had only seen it.⁷⁷

This incident very much serves to locate the natives as the **feminised** east, bereft of all the western masculine attributes. It is a standard Orientalist attitude of **placing** the orient in a weak feminine state, and self-contradictory in its depiction of the heathens as **barbarous** head-hunters.

But the setbacks were balanced by the relative success they had with the natives and the

⁷³ Leslie A. Flemming, "A New Humanity: American Missionaries' Ideals for Women in North India, 1870-1930", n. 33, p. 194.

⁷⁴ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

missionary spirit rejoiced when they witnessed the fruits of their labour:

We had a fine service in Asangma. Four asked for Baptism. The boys of the mission school read and sang very well, all of which served to encourage us greatly.⁷⁸

In a very humorous twist of events during the tour, the missionary couple found themselves treated as objects of horror from the natives, who had never seen white people before:

At Lungsang, the people seemed very much afraid of our white faces, calling out that the “devils” had come.⁷⁹

Instead of the wild natives being objects of fear and horror for the travellers, the roles were reversed and the Europeans were Othered in this instance. They were looked at by the natives as deviant from the usual order of things where the natives belonged, and in this way became Othered. This was not the only occurrence of such an event, as Hattie narrates a similar incident in another village:

Here too we met some women who ran back shrieking with fear, where upon an ugly-looking man appeared grasping a long spear. It was a relief when our men came up to vouch for us, and to explain to us that these people had never before seen foreigners.⁸⁰

The remaining part of the tour was unsuccessful as they came across more hostile villages, and Sidney became ill with fever. During this time Hattie worried for their safety and felt that they were vulnerable in the midst of so many unfriendly natives. In addition, the helper who had the necessary funds to pay their carriers failed to turn up at the rendezvous point. Hattie wrote, “I was so frightened I could neither eat nor sleep”, exemplifying the mistrust they felt towards the savages who refused to be converted to Christianity. Here was a situation where everything that was wild and unchristian posed a danger to the missionaries, threatening their safety and security:

Here I was with a sick husband among a savage people who had never heard of us, our servant miles away in a hostile village, and no money with which to bribe carriers to get us home.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Hattie's entire letter of 1885 is an interesting **study of Western attitudes towards the natives**. It is also an important documentation of an instance of **encounters between the colonisers and the colonised**, where both parties objectify the other **as strange and unusual**, evoking fear in each other. This is in glaring contrast to the tamed **savages of the classroom** whom Hattie was to label as 'instinctive gentlemen', the huge divider **between** these two types of **savages** being Christianity.

Life in the frontier would indeed have been **difficult for a pioneering missionary woman**, beset with worries about safety, health, well-being of **the family** as well as winning native converts. These problems were furthermore accentuated **by the thoughts of the home country and the heartbreak involved in parting with family**. In **spite** of all these setbacks, **their accounts** remarkably come across as examples in **endurance of spirit and optimism** and **whatever the motives that designed and shaped their actions**, **women missionaries made their marks** as courageous travellers, brave crusaders and **inspirational figures**.

Hattie's story is more tragic for the fact that she **met her end** in Kohima, Naga Hills **after much sacrifice and services for the savages that she strove so hard to 'lead to the light'**. **After fourteen years (1883-1908) of selfless laboring among the natives**, she succumbed after suffering from a strangulated hernia.

A heart-broken Sidney was to write to their **daughter** Narola, then a freshman at **Bucknell University, America**:

All the Europeans and natives spared no service **they could render**...and in a pouring rain the **Christians she loved bore her on their shoulders out of the home she had made and loved to the Government Cemetery**...Darling, she was ours, but she was the **Lord's first**. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his Saints."⁸²

Rereading Sidney's Letters: Looking for Meaning beyond the Hills

Coming out as a young missionary to Assam, India, Sidney Rivenburg created a permanent niche for himself in the hearts of the people in the Naga Hills. Initially, as in all encounters where a 'superior' culture tries to topple the orders of a primitive society, he was met

⁸² Ibid., p. 107.

with resistance and struggle from the Nagas. But the success of his missionary endeavor in the end manifested in a loyal native population of converts.

Sidney's first impression of India on reaching Calcutta was the glaring climatic difference between India and North America, and this was further emphasised by the consciousness that people in America would be celebrating a Christian holiday:

We start for Assam tomorrow, Christmas Day! Here the trees are green and hanging full of fruit. Vines are growing. Roses and other flowers are in full bloom. There is nothing but the calendar to remind our North American minds that the world is celebrating its Christian anniversary.⁸³

The tendency of the missionary traveller to compare India with the rest of the Christian world is obvious here, and also the picturesque description of the flowering fauna only serves to remind the Christian readers of its futile beauty in a heathen land. Thus the letter establishes a dichotomy between the Christian/non Christian worlds, where a Christian piety is noticeably missing in the non Christian world. Moreover, for a traveller visiting a place for the first time, there is a conspicuous absence of its inhabitants in the letter.

Mary Louise Pratt, when she talks about the 'white man's lament', analyses postcolonial travelogues which 'perch themselves to paint the significance and value of what they see'.⁸⁴ Though she is talking in the context of postcolonial travel writers such as Alberto Moravia and Paul Theroux, we can draw a connection between the trends of writing in the era of the colonial expansion and its aftermath. The Euroimperial fashion of writing about the Other landscape as devoid of any meaning, lacking shape, finiteness, pattern and history comes from the "dehumanizing western habit of representing other parts of the world as having no history".⁸⁵

Sidney's letter of June 25th 1885 communicates to his parents that they have at last reached their 'long-looked-for home in the clouds'.⁸⁶ The topography of the Hills in all its beauty is impossible to describe without invoking a western locale as an object of comparison "Those who can, compare the beauty of our scenery with that of Switzerland".⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁴ Marie Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen", *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, vol 12, no. 1, 1985, p. 216.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

⁸⁶ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 44

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

The beauty of the hills is meaningless **without** finding a familiar example to **lend** it form and meaning. This lack is supplemented by **borrowing** from Switzerland, the unrivalled **beauty** of the European world. Thus the Hills of the east **emerge** as a poor replica of the **unsurpassed grandeur** of the west.

Even the inhabitants are found similar to **the American Indians** at home and a **description** is furnished to enable a closer juxtaposition **between** the two subjugated peoples:

The people look very much like our **American Indians**. The men are naked, except for a very small strip of cloth hanging down in front.⁸⁸

Again, he tries to show a closer similarity **between** the Nagas and the American Indians:

When they have feasts, they dress up in **all their jewelry**, bright clothes, spears and knives. **They** dance or march to the accompaniment of a big drum, **sometimes** singly, sometimes in groups, very **much** as do the American Indians.⁸⁹

By mentioning the American Indians, **Sidney Rivenburg** unconsciously recalls the **domination** of the New World by the Old World, and the **implication** is deeper through the **coincidence** that he is one of the descendants of the Puritan **father**, now going off to another **heathen land** to save the savages. The entire history of 'discovery' of **lands** and peoples are questioned when issues of languages, histories and civilizations are **brought** up. Recent analysis has a very **different** perception of the incidents of 'discoveries', as Susan Bassnett writes:

The New World may have been **appropriated** by the Old, but the native inhabitants of that **New World** were dispossessed or exterminated in the process. 'Pre-Columbian' has virtually come to **signify** 'pre-history', for with the arrival of the Europeans, the **civilizations** of the Americas, their languages and their names, were doomed.⁹⁰

No less in the manners of old-time **crusaders** and adventurers, the missionaries **sought** to travel off into 'undiscovered' heathen territory, **propagating** the religion of Christianity. The **only catch** was that the institution of Christianity **demande**d of the natives to wipe out their **entire histories**, in part collaborating with the dogmas of **imperialism**. The advancement of Christianity in the Naga Hills involved no physical violence except minor skirmishes initially between the natives

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹⁰ Susan Bassnett, "Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Travellers' Tales", n. 62, p. 71.

and the missionaries, but it left the inhabitants dispossessed of everything they had formerly believed in.

Healer of Bodies and Souls

By the time Sidney and Hattie went to America for their first furlough (1892-94), he had already gained knowledge of the Angami Naga language, enabling him to translate Matthew, John and Acts from the Greek into the Angami language. He made use of his time at home by enrolling himself at the Baltimore Medical College and graduating in 1894. He also passed the Pennsylvania State Board examinations in the summer of that same year.⁹¹ Thus when he returned to India from his furlough, he was a fully qualified physician ready to resume his duty among the people of the hills. He was to write of this new achievement:

..I hope the lessons learned in Baltimore Medical College are not so far past as not to be usable here where most needed as we start a new chapter in our work in Assam.⁹²

This new qualification of Sidney's was in part responsibility for 'thawing the ice' with the natives, who gradually started receiving medical treatment from the missionary for their ailments. Hattie's letter proves that Sidney's reputation as a doctor greatly enhanced his standing in the eyes of the villagers:

Since our return to Assam, the attitude of the Kohima village folk has completely changed toward us. Before, they were coldly curious... We feel that one reason is because Sidney is a full-fledged doctor. He seems to have an uncanny accuracy in diagnosing these Oriental diseases. He has had amazing recoveries among his patients.⁹³

And she gives an example:

Sidney has successfully removed several cataracts. One man, who was blind and now sees, is so grateful that when we were coming over to Impur this last time he insisted on carrying our loads for nothing, telling everyone he met that this was the Sahib who made him see... Sidney has lots of practice that would never come to an American doctor.⁹⁴

Almost in the manner of his Master Jesus Christ who performed many miracles among the sick, Sidney had the 'healing touch'. This aspect gave him the figure of a great healer in the eyes of

⁹¹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 85.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

the natives, innocent as they were of the idea of sophisticated western medicine.

Especially during the outbreak of epidemics, Sidney's medical training proved invaluable in the Kohima station. An exhausted father wrote to his daughter soon after Hattie's death:

Cholera and smallpox are rampant. Dr. Kirby, of Sadiya, is recovering from cholera and Mrs. Boggs is convalescing from typhoid fever. One of Niser's children has smallpox. Vaccination has prevented a heavy death rate, typical of previous epidemics. We may need to postpone the opening of school, in which case I would be sorry, for the more I have to do, the less time I shall have to think.⁹⁵

Sidney was successful as a saviour of lives as well as a saviour of souls. His ability to heal had become such well-known knowledge that the natives came to him and in this way, his medical skills aided his mission work. He wrote:

Last Monday a baby of eight months was brought to me with the worst case of diseased eyes that I ever saw. I worked for more than two hours applying hot fomentations and instilling drops, then sent away the parents with three kinds of medicines in their hands, and a great fear in their hearts... Yesterday, both eyes were much better.⁹⁶

Missionaries, working among poor and underprivileged groups, were "appalled" by "dirt" as much as by "ignorance" and "darkness"—all of which were conflated in missionary discourses on "heathen lands". Evangelical aims to "dispel darkness", "wash away sins", and "redeem souls" led to compulsive prescriptions of cleanliness. Simple remedies followed, becoming the genesis of dispensaries that operated from the verandas of the mission bungalow.⁹⁷

Thus in most cases missionaries were equipped with knowledge of medicine in order to woo the local community and to build trust and maintain it. In this regard, Sidney achieved momentous recognition and performed numerous feats in healing the people.

Going out on an Errand to the Heathen World

Sidney Rivenburg, from his first contact with the hills people, assumed the onus of Christianising and civilising them. He saw it rightful that he had been called by God to this hinterland to proselytize the Gospel to these people. For an outsider to assume the rights of

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 110-11.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

⁹⁷ Mani Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands": American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860's-1940's)*, n. 8, p. 64.

reforming a people through conversion to his religion was an enormous task requiring a staunch confidence in the superiority of his culture and religion, and the missionary often wondered whether he was doing the right thing, but never once faltered in his convictions.

Perhaps in response to the activities and travel accounts of the missionaries, we can label them in the same category as Marie Louise Pratt's "anti-conquest", which refers to the strategies of representation whereby "European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony".⁹⁸ Sidney Rivenburg in his early years of missionary work wrote in this vein:

I do not worry as to whether we shall be safe here, but whether it is safe for the people to have us. In God's hands we are safe anywhere. But if I teach false doctrine, or no doctrine, and these thousands are lost in consequence, better would it be if I had never been born. God is just and good. I see it to be his will that I break the bread of life to this people.⁹⁹

The missionaries, while piteously lamenting whether they were doing the 'right thing' were nevertheless unstoppable in their zeal to convert and civilise. That this was the only solution left for such a wretched population, can be surmised from their representations and accounts.

William Hutchison, in *Errand to the World* analyses the development of American Protestant mission theology identifies the two key motifs in American mission thinking which are, an emphasis on direct evangelism and an emphasis on the civilizing activities thought necessary for making evangelism more effective. These two motifs are seen to have received equal emphasis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century mission thinking. Suggesting that Americans felt themselves a chosen people, Hutchison argues that mission theorists expressed a strong sense of both the superiority of American culture and Americans' responsibility to save the world by imposing their own culture on it.¹⁰⁰

This responsibility can be seen in Sidney's sense of achievement on reflecting about the success of the mission in the Naga Hills. His letter of 1912 to his daughter reads:

⁹⁸ Marie Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen", n. 84, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ See William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

...I could not help but wonder if my work **were done**; if so, I welcomed them with a full heart, and committed to them the burden I have carried for **thirty-five** years, that of the salvation of the **Angamis and neighboring tribes**.¹⁰¹

A preoccupying thought with the missionaries **was** the enormous job of training natives to become religious leaders. Prompted by the **knowledge** that they would not be around forever in the Naga Hills, and that they would be **eventually** going back to their homelands, the missionaries were faced with the situation of **preparing** natives to take over the reins of religious leadership for their people. Sidney, on interacting **with** the only two Ao Nagas who could read in the Molung mission during the early years of his life as a missionary, pondered on their **abilities** as future religious leaders of the people:

They are the only Nagas who can read. How I wish I could see evidences that God had called them to preach the Gospel to their fellow countrymen! I **have no hope** for the success of this mission **until** the natives learn to do the work. A foreigner may **instruct and guide**, but never lead, as would a **member of the company**.¹⁰²

The amount of Sidney's influence as a missionary, **an educator** and a doctor among the **Angami Nagas** in the Kohima mission proved to be momentous for the Nagas, who were **gradually being** exposed to a world other than their own, a world **which was** more sophisticated and 'civilised'. It was a world that offered countless opportunities for a **person** with education, as the **Nagas were** to discover. In spite of the loss of his wife who **was an** enthusiastic worker with him in the Molung mission as well as during the initial years of **the Kohima** mission, Dr. Rivenburg went about his work among the natives, working with more **dedication** than ever. In 1908 he wrote to his daughter about the successful result of his hard labour:

I think I fired the ambition of one of the boys to **become an** assistant surgeon in the government **hospital** here. I have hired another boy, the son of Lucitsu, Mr. **King's** first convert among the Angamis, to **take his** Bible to the village, and read it to whomever will listen...**Another** of our church members is a **peddler** of jewelry among the villages. I suggested that he include a few simple remedies such as quinine, Dover Powders, etc., to get the notion of buying medicines...¹⁰³

Much Maligned Travellers/ Unsung Heroes?

Rivenburg was, in many ways, not only the religious instructor and physician among the natives, but he also fitted the role of an innovator of ideas and as an inspiration for the newly

¹⁰¹ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 127.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 111-12.

educated young men of the Hills. The huge success of the missionary was felt by Narola Rivenburg when she joined her father for a year in the Naga Hills after Hattie passed away. On her visit, Narola wrote about the great change brought about by Christianity in the Hills:

Thirty years ago, this same man had come to Kohima, a young warrior seeking human heads to ornament his doorposts. But today he comes pleading for a teacher, and for a school in his village. From the back of the room comes the voice of one of our most promising young schoolboys, who has just returned from attending the World's Christian Endeavor Convention held in Agra. I suppose we can have no idea of the thrill and astonishment that must have been his as he found himself one of 4,000 delegates sent from all over the world.¹⁰⁴

This new christianised Other characterises the phenomenon of 'transculturation' that describes how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. In Pratt's words, "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"¹⁰⁵. The Nagas, recognising the futility of their resistance to a stronger power than their own, received whatever beneficial things could be gotten from this new religion and the education it brought in its wake, with the vision that it would gain them admittance into the outside world.

On December 28th 1910 Sidney Rivenburg married Helen Protzman, who had been sent by the missionary union to Nowgong, Assam in 1908 to head the girl's school. He found an invaluable helper in Helen as she took care of the house, was involved actively in mission work as well as teaching in the mission school. It was with her help that the mission school in Kohima was reorganized into a Middle School to correspond with the English-Indian system. She organized an 'Infant Class' branch from the regular Sunday services for children, conducted music lessons for girls, and prepared them to be suitable wives for 'young Christian school boys'.¹⁰⁶

Towards the last years of their campaign in the Naga Hills, the husband-wife duo managed to garner every bit of local support for their work, making the Kohima mission an example of accelerated successes within just a few years. On the event of his imminent departure from the Naga Hills in 1923, Sidney wrote to Narola about the farewell:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁰⁵ Marie Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen", n. 84, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Narola Rivenburg, ed., *The Star of the Naga Hills*, n. 2, p. 120.

Leaving Kohima with little hope of return **has been pretty hard**. After school on Wednesday I **met with the teachers, meeting which had a damp ending. I begged them not to notice us when the time came for leaving, for I wanted to get away as early as possible...**¹⁰⁷

Awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind by the British Government just before he left the Naga Hills finally to return to his homeland, Sidney wrote in pure **missionary spirit**:

I am not enough of a hypocrite to assert that **this government** recognition of the value of **my work the Nagas** has meant nothing to me, and yet I feel if **only one** was to receive it, it should have **been Dr. Mason**, [another fellow Baptist missionary in the Garo Hills] of Tura.¹⁰⁸

Especially with the dawn of post-colonialism, **the missionary** has emerged as a **much-maligned** figure, entangled with the controversies surrounding the imperial designs. However, **apologists** today argue that the fundamental difference **between the British Indian empire and the missionaries working in India** lay in their priorities. **The missionaries differed on the ground that their priority was not the construction or maintenance of empire, but the conversion of as many as possible to Christianity.**¹⁰⁹ But it is generally **agreed upon** that the missionaries **did play a significant part in constructing negative images of India and other parts of the Orient. This was done partly through a selective method of illustrating and reporting in order to arouse public support and enthusiasm for the missionary movement, as illustrated in the discussion of Mary Mead Clark's *A Corner in India*. The focus on the cruel and inhumane and on the seemingly irrational and strange broadened the gap and reinforced the feeling that Orientals were essentially different, alien and inferior.**¹¹⁰

Nineteenth century evangelicalism, it has been **opined, placed emphasis on Christianity as a way of life, a lifestyle to be adopted. The Doctrine of Christianity was important but meaningless if not associated with a transformed life. Whether the missionaries were conscious of it or not, the adoption of new lifestyles constituted a fundamental challenge to the traditional cultures.**¹¹¹

For the missionaries, an acceptable Christian lifestyle **constituted giving up intoxicants such as**

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Oddie, *Missionaries, Rebellion and Proto-Nationalism. James Long of Bengal 1814-87*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999, p. 182.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹¹ Frederick. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Bangalore: The Church History Association of India. 1992, pp. 146-47.

liquor and opium, sensitisation of the natives towards social evils like slavery, stressing on the importance of personal hygiene and also the matter of dress. During an Ao Association meeting, a proposal raised by the missionaries was, "Some costume, a little more cloth, was recommended".¹¹² The missionaries proved to be staunch opposers on the issue of slavery which was practiced in Assam and when the slavery question was being debated in Assam, a controversy on the subject was taking place in the United States which would lead to the division of the Baptist church in America in 1845. It also led to a civil war between the northern and southern states in America fifteen years later. At this time, all the Baptist missionaries in Assam came from North America and they were strong supporters of the anti-slavery movement. One of the pioneer Baptist missionaries in America, Nathan Brown, was to become a prominent figure in the anti-slavery movement upon his return to the U. S. in 1857.¹¹³

While it is generally accepted that Christianity introduced in the lifestyles of the hills people in particular, what is more important is to determine whether or not the changes were deep, or whether it represents only a superficial copying of western ways, of being dazzled by the prestige of the white man.¹¹⁴ However, it has been observed that the discontinuity between Christianity and the old way of life has not been as radical as might be suggested otherwise. The function of the rites and taboo observances of the old religion was to liberate people from the harmful activities of malevolent spirits. Initially, many became Christians because they were convinced that the new religion was more effective than the old in securing this objective. However, a belief in the existence of malevolent spirits is still prevalent among the tribal Christians today.¹¹⁵

As Downs shows, it is true that many elements of traditional life which, on the surface seem to have been abandoned by the converts are still surviving under new guises, comfortably with the new order. The Christian hostel system has replaced the bachelor's dormitory and the observance of the Christmas feast can be likened to the former feasts of merit performed by the pre-Christian natives.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, p. 143.

¹¹³ Frederick. S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, n. 111, p. 150.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165. See also Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co, Rpt 1968, p. 53.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

The colonial encounter between the missionaries and the inhabitants of the Naga Hills serves to highlight a very interesting “contact” perspective of the contact zone, emphasizing how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. In this respect, the relations among colonisers and colonised, or travellers and ‘travelees’, were not established in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Marie Louise Pratt, “Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen”, n. 84, p. 7.

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

It has been noticed that while travel literature as a genre is being studied in academia today, and the “forgotten” accounts of women travellers are brought into focus, adequate attention has not been paid to missionary accounts. My contention here again is, missionary accounts are as much a part of travel account as the other “secular” travel narratives. I have shown through numerous arguments and examples of how they participated actively in the colonial discourse, thereby indirectly acting as collaborators in the imperial designs.

For instance, the texts that I have looked at demonstrate how the missionaries were part and parcel of the colonial project during their missionising project. Recognising the prospect of lucrative commercial opportunities in the region, they supported the control of the tea trade in Assam because to them, the natives were incompetent as I have illustrated in Chapter 1. The discussion in Chapter 2 further bring a new perspective in the missionary discourse by studying how a missionary woman negotiated with the issues of travelling and the colonising mission. In Chapter 3 I have examined the shared but separate experiences of a missionary couple’s life in the frontier through their letters.

I have also brought up the issue of the woman/missionary/ wife traveller and the numerous issues that emerge along with this. The negotiations that worked towards textual constructions by these women bear testimony to the unique positioning of their accounts. However, another interesting angle has been omitted in my discussion, for I have failed to touch upon the travels undertaken by single women missionaries, a large number of whom came out to the “heathen lands” especially from the latter part of the nineteenth century. It would, I believe, prove to be a rewarding exercise to engage intimately with their accounts if they are to be placed within the framework of feminist discourse.

The limitation of my study is exemplified by the fact that I have been unable to carry out a *closer* reading of more male missionary accounts. My focusing on women missionaries’ texts meant that I could not devote more of my attention to the male-generated texts. However, these texts also have an equally important contribution to add to the ever expanding studies on the relation between colonialism and travel literature.

An interest in the colonial travel accounts of **the region** will, I hope, provide an **explanation** for the detached isolation north east India adopts in its relations to other parts of India and vice versa. Interesting perspectives has come up for **further study** in the course of my **dissertation**, demanding a more thorough research. The **education** system is a relic from the **foregone days** of the missionaries, and perhaps it will furnish an **explanation** as to why almost all the **former hill districts** (and sites of mission activities) have **adopted** a linguistic alienation from the rest of India, which is just one example. I would **say that** this is another manifestation of the phenomenon of “transculturation”¹, which needs to be addressed more seriously.

Travel literatures on the north east sheds a **considerable** amount of light on the **implications** of constructing cultural stereotypes, which are still **alive and working** in India, where the **north east** region is concerned. It is said that from travellers’ **accounts** of their journeys we can **trace the** presence of cultural stereotypes, and the way in **which** an individual reacts to **what is seen** elsewhere can reflect tendencies in the traveller’s **home country**.² Unfortunately, **traveller’s** accounts of the north east have rendered a **version** of the region which has **been partly** responsible for the alienated stance of the region.

The missionaries left another legacy behind, which **played** a major role in isolating the **north east** culturally from the rest of the country. The success of **the different** missions proselytising in the hills is evident from the religious solidarity of the **area**. In almost all the hill states, **Christianity**, no matter what denomination, predominates over **all other** established religions. In fact, it can be said that Christianity is *the* religion in the hill states of the north east, of which Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are the forerunners. It has **been observed** through colonial accounts that the missionaries encouraged a “mission-compound **mentality**” among their native converts, making them feel different from the non-Christian converts. The fostering of this attitude among the converts deserve closer scrutiny, for it should be **remembered** that the missionaries arrived with a sense of their religious and cultural superiority over the heathens. i.e., any non-Christian.

This recalls Homi Bhabha’s critique on colonial mimicry, which is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same. but not quite*. He says

¹ Marie Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 6.

² Susan Bassnett, “Constructing Cultures: The Politics of Traveller’s Tales”, in Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p.93.

that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. It is from the area between mimicry and mockery that the reforming, civilising mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.³

Missionary educationists sought to educate the natives to produce mimic western replicas, who were almost the same like them but not quite the same. The natives in this predicament suffered what I should call the “hangovers of civilisation”, not exulting but confused in their new hybridized beings.

Another limitation which I hope will be corrected in future study is that, the scope of my research did not allow me to expand my interest to the other missionary texts about the erstwhile hill districts of Assam. While I have talked about the American Baptist Missionary Union, it has not been possible for me to look at the accounts of other missions such as the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, which was one of the most successful missions in the north east. Along with this shortcoming, I have been unable to discuss *all* the accounts of the American Baptist missionaries, but my study was restricted to some missions in the Naga Hills. It would be an engrossing task to rectify all these limitations when a broader research is carried out.

By addressing the missionary accounts as travel literature, two things stand highlighted in the discussion. The first is, though missionary accounts have always been included as a sub-genre of travel literature, to my knowledge there has never been an attempt to evaluate the missionary accounts intimately. Secondly, it is surprising and sad that travel accounts about the north eastern part of India has never been accorded the interest they deserve in re/readings of colonial travel accounts. In spite of the abundance of “undiscovered” written material, these accounts are relegated to invisibility in the numerous retrievals by critics done in travel literature today. It is easy to see that this is not due to unavailability of scope or materials, but solely due to disinterest in the region. As a result, the north east of India remains clubbed together as a vague and indefinable “north east”, shrouded in mists of obscurity. The area of travel literature has nothing to lose and everything to gain in its field if it were to gaze towards the north eastern part of India.

³ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man”, in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, Rpt 1998, p. 86.

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