

**RELIGION AND IDENTITY: MISSION
NETWORKS IN THE INDIA-BURMA
BORDERLAND**

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SORUN ASAIWO



**SPECIAL CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF NORTH EAST INDIA
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067**

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उत्तर-पूर्व भारत अध्ययन विशेष केंद्र
Special Centre for the Study of North East India(SCSNEI)
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान / School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय / Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली-११००६७, भारत / New Delhi - 110 067, India
Tel : +91-11-26704786, E-mail: neispjnu@gmail.com

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DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled '*Religion and Identity: Mission Networks in the India-Burma Borderland*' submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of **Jawaharlal Nehru University** is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

Sorun Asaiwo
Sorun Asaiwo

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Pradipta Chaudhury

Prof. Pradipta K. Chaudhury

(Chairperson, SCSNEI)

अध्यक्ष / Chairperson
उत्तर-पूर्व भारत अध्ययन विशेष केंद्र
Special Centre for the Study of North East India
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान / School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय / Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली-११००६७, New Delhi - 110 067



Lipokmar Dzuwichu

Dr. Lipokmar Dzuwichu

(Supervisor, SCSNEI)

सहायक प्राध्यापक / Assistant Professor
उत्तर-पूर्व भारत अध्ययन विशेष केंद्र
Special Centre for the Study of North East India
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान / School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय / Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली-११००६७ / New Delhi - 110 067



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Expanded form
ABMU	American Baptist Foreign Mission Union
ABMU	Assam Baptist Mission Union
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Power Act
AWID	Action of Women in Development
BOSEM	Board of Secondary Education Manipur
CBCNEI	Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India
CeWE	Centre for Women Empowerment
EDWA	East District Women Association
ETNBA	Eastern Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association
HSLC	High School Leaving Certificate
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
MBC	Manipur Baptist Convention
MEADC	Manipur East Autonomous District Council
NBSE	Nagaland Board of secondary Education
NEBAM	North East Baptist Association Manipur
NSCN-IM	National Socialist Council of Nagaland Isak-Muivah
NTNBA	Northern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association
PASDO	Participatory Action for Sustainable Development
STNBA	Southern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association
STNBA-Somra	Southern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association-Somra
STNBC	Somra Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association
TBCA	Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association
TCD	Tangkhul Church Delhi
TNBC	Tangkhul Naga Baptist Convention
TNL	Tangkhul Naga <i>Long</i>
TNSBA	Tangkhul Naga Somra Baptist Association

TSL	Tangkhul <i>Shanao Long</i>
TTA	Tangkhul Theological Association
UDCRMS	Ukhrul District Community Resources Management Scheme
UDWIM	Ukhrul District Women Institute of Micro-Credit
WABFMS	Women's American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society
WBFS	Women Baptist Foreign Society
WTNBA	Western Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association

Introduction

This dissertation is an attempt to examine the role of Christian mission networks in the making of Tangkhul identity. Focussing primarily on the Tangkhuls living across the border area of India and Burma, this research explores the interface between the cultural and political identities of the Tangkhul community while discussing how ethnic and cultural identities are bounded, connected and governed by religion on both sides of the borderland (**figure, 1**)¹. The dynamics of contact between the Tangkhuls in India and Burma borderland will be studied and in the process, this study will look into how religion has actively enabled the formation of a common identity or an “imagined community”². Christianity played a significant role in transmitting, reinforcing and legitimising traditional and cultural elements, especially by transcending the state constructed borderland to support a sense of ethnic identity. This research will also study the role of women in the mission field and their significance in the nation building process while discussing the challenges endured by women in the society. It is also an attempt to explore the complexities of “absence” and “presence” of borders in the region. Further, this research seek to study the role of mission networks as an important agency in linking and connecting people across the border. It also attempts to explore how ideas, people, practices, mission networks, modern education, evangelism and the native churches play a crucial role in producing and expanding religious geography.

¹The Tangkhuls constitute one of the many Naga ‘tribes’ living across India and Burma. Tangkhuls in India predominantly inhabit Ukhrul, Kamjong and Senapati Districts, while in Burma, they inhabit parts of Somra Tract, namely, Layshi and Homalin Township, which is a Naga self-administered zone. Geographically, Tangkhuls are divided into viz. Raphei (North), Somra (Northeast), Rem (East), Veikhang (Southeast) Kamo (South), Kharao (West), Khaorui (Southwest), Kharao-Raora (Northwest) and Kathur (Centre) (Horam, 1977). However, in the earlier days this categorization of the region was not strictly based on geography, but rather on the social and cultural characteristics of the people.

² Benedict, A. (1987). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso

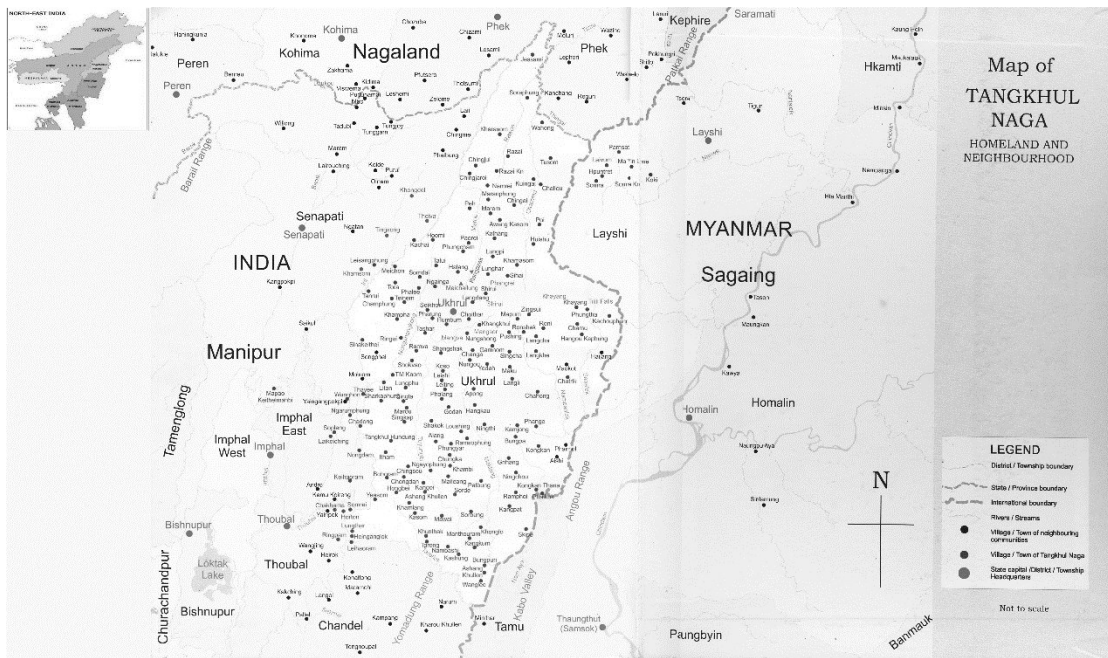


Figure 1: Map of Tangkhul Naga homeland and neighbourhood in the India and Burma borderland (Source: Shongzan, 2013).

The arrival of Christian missionaries and colonial state in Manipur and more specifically in the Tangkhul areas, exposed the Tangkhuls to new experiences and new worldviews. In the course of the 19th and 20th century, various processes led to transformation in the Tangkhul hills and Manipur, such as redrawing of spaces, conversion, formal education, introduction of Western biomedicine and imposition of new political and judiciary system, etc. The experiences encountered by the Tangkhuls during World War I and World War II (Wungnaoyo, 2011; Shishak, 1996), expansion of external forces towards their land and the consequences of these wars affected the self-sufficient society beyond restoration. After the World War II, famine and diseases struck the community massively. Therefore, mass conversion was rampant among the community to find solace and by taking this opportunity, native missionaries gradually worked towards replacing the existing religious and cultural practices of the community. As pointed out by Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1991), although in a different context, this process is done through the regular intervention in the mundane and everyday life of the local people and thrust the hegemonic, exercise of power over a period of time. Eventually, the meeting of the old and new world led to the dialectic of contestation and hostility in the Tangkhul hills, not only between the Tangkhuls and the external forces but also within the

community. In order to cater to the needs of the community (Nagas) and respond to the changing social and cultural, political and religious affair from external incursion and domination, the need to constitute their identity became more imperative, especially, post Indian independence.

The trend of changes led to the transformation of 'traditional' culture into modernity. This transformation gave rise to the much needed reformation of the Tangkhul society. In this process, Christianity emerged as an important aspect of common identity formation and connecting the Tangkhuls in the 'margin' as well. It also emerged as a space where Christian bodies could earnestly work for the welfare of the community, besides religious affairs. These apex Christian associations of the Tangkhuls comprises of all the Christians from their various villages. As such, the function and the role of the associations were not independent of the socio-political affairs of the community. In this way, mission networks play a crucial role in connecting and reconnecting the Tangkhuls straddled across India and Burma. In this sense, religion act as central in configuring their identities and worldviews, and as a "contact zone" (Pratt, 1992) in which individuals or groups interact through religious events, schools, education and humanitarian activities. Religion, according to Alexander Horstmann³, is an important aspect in the assimilation of the community into national ideologist or nationhood. Therefore, this study is an attempt to look into the Tangkhul community in terms of continuities and cultural dynamics. Based on these research concerns, I would like to broadly outline the objectives and research questions of this study.

The broad objectives envisaged in this research are:

- To study the dynamics of contact between the Tangkhul Naga community in India and Burma borderland.
- To study the role of the churches and Christian associations in transmitting, reinforcing, and legitimizing traditional cultural elements which help to transcend the border to support a sense of ethnic identity.
- To study the role of women in mission field and their contribution to nation building process.

³ Alexander Horstmann (2010). "Confinement and mobility".

- To study the missionary women and their role in the evangelizing process across the border and examining their lives in greater detail.
- It is also an attempt to study the complexities of “absence” and “presence” of borders in the region and challenges to the societal, cultural norms and religion in everyday life.

Research Questions

- How is mission as a process understood? Who is in control of the process? How does mission network shape and mediate in the making of Tangkhul identity?
- How are Tangkhul community connected and/or bounded and governed by religion on both sides of the borderland?
- How do people negotiate the ‘absence’ and ‘presence’ of the border in the region and are accustomed to the borderland state of affairs?
- How do borderlands shape and reshape social and religious thinking?

Review of literature

North East India has historically experienced various social, cultural, economic and political changes, especially with the coming of colonialism and the emergence of new nation state in the post-colonial period. Scholars working on the region has underlined the significant impact these transformations had on the region. Of these, an important theme that scholars have explored is on the history of Christianity and its linkages to the dynamics of social and political changes. Various aspects such as conversion, the history of Baptist mission, modern education, medical mission and social and cultural change have been examined by various scholars. For instance, scholars like Frederick Downs, in his book *Christianity in North East India* (1983), Lal Dena’s *Christian Mission and Colonialism* (1988), Abraham Lotha’s *History of Naga Anthropology* (2007) and John Thomas’s *Evangelising the nation* (2015) have done the in-depth studies on colonial and Christian missionary encounter among the Naga communities and North East India at large. These studies also reveal the shift from the colonial imperialist agenda to social-cultural context.

In the context of the Tangkhul's, ethnographic work and historical research have been done by early native scholars like Maiya Gachui and T. Luikham. Gachui's *Hao Miun Ngashan kala Tangkhul Khararchan* (1986) presents an auto-ethnographic account as an evangelist-cum-teacher in Somra Tangkhul village across the border in 1932. In his writing, the notion of the Tangkhul Naga community as one in the expansion of religious frontier is deeply embedded. Similarly, Luikham in his work, *Transformed head Hunter* (1998), wrote that people of Tangkhul Nagas are grateful to Revd. William Pettigrew for bringing Christianity into their land. They strongly opined that Christianity brought them out of 'darkness to light' which was given by God through Pettigrew. These early works, thus internalized the missionary teachings and considered that colonialization and proselytization have been beneficial. As such, the impact of colonial narrative and missionary views on traditional values, culture and belief is deeply reflected in their writings.

The shift in the writing of Tangkhul community is visible in the work of scholars like Mashangthei Horam's, *Social and Cultural life of Naga* (1977), Khashim Ruivah's, *Social change among the Nagas (Tangkhul)* (1993), A. S. W. Shimray's *History of the Tangkhul Naga* (2001), Reisang Vashum's *et al., Encountering Modernity* (2014) and Khaiyar's Gachui's, *Odyssey of Naga* (2010). These, scholars write from the realisation that the history represented or 'constructed' by the colonial officials and missionaries are internalized by the Tangkhul community. Thus, their works indicate a conscious effort to revive and retain lost tradition which has been misrepresented by the 'outsider'. Ruivah (1993) traces the social system and cultural history of the Tangkhul community which are disappearing under the impact of modernisation and conversion to Christianity. A new way of life brought by Christianity and contact with the outside world, formal education and the imposition of the new political system etc., are issues discussed in his work. Shimray Awungshi (2014) in his study examines the history of the Tangkhul Nagas, and its political institution through an in-depth study of the village system. In his writing, he mentions about the presence of Tangkhuls in Burma, despite their cultural assimilation to Shan and Burmese culture. While these studies have brought new perspective in understanding the Tangkhul society, very little study have however focused on the Tangkhuls inhabiting the India and Burma borderland where religion is taken as the prism to study the social-cultural reality on both sides of the border.

The writings in the post-colonial period shows a stark contrast to the earlier work in representing Christian missionaries. For instance, the dynamics of indigenous people's conversion to Christianity is highlighted in Robert L. Winzele work, *Anthropology and Religion: What We Know, Think and Question* (2012). He interrogates the notion of a universal religion and asserts that western understanding in the division of natural and supernatural is not universal but as one of the characteristics of human mentality and that distinction is basic to all religious belief and faith. He also looks at the ethnic population conversion to Christianity through the highlander and lowlander dynamics.

In an important study on Christianity in North East India, Frederick Downs (1983) looks into the significant impact of Christianity in the Northeast region and how the native appropriated the Christian gospel as well as their culture in the society. He argues that in the post independent India, 'tribal' Christian are not committed to the Indian nationalism, as Christianity was established among them by the missionaries. Therefore religion emerged as an important aspect in consolidating group unity.

Lal Dena (1988), Khashim Ruivah (1993), AS.W Shimray (2001) also shows how education and translation of literature in vernacular language led to the emergence of the educated elite class. Dena looks into the native Christian missionary approach in missionizing process and argues that they began to look at their tradition through the 'master' lens and internalized their teaching. Scholars like Ruivah and Shimray shared the similar view that encountering Christianity led to the emergence of elite groups and formation of common identity consciousness which later developed into the political movement based on identity. John Thomas (2015) in his analysis of the Naga nationalist movement suggest as to how "religious institutions, ideas and practices, with transnational presence, did have an impact on the local political movement". He argues that Christianity was not a priority for the Naga national movement, though it gained more significance later as a way of opposing Indian nationalism. In fact, he does not undermine the influence of Christianity as an important mechanism in constructing 'modern' national identity among the Nagas. In the same context of the Mizo Joy L.K Pachuau (2014) argues that colonial administration and Christian missions in collaboration rendered great help in awakening the people to a modern

“national consciousness” and development of their modern language and literature which led to the emergence of new social connections, institutions and cultural practices. She also argues that this consciousness helped develop the notion of an imagined Zo community with the conglomeration of distinct tribes who earlier had no such self-identification. Shimreiwung⁴ have also explore the transition of the Tangkhul from an oral society to the development of print culture and how the notion of ‘one community’ within the community was filtered through the mode of print culture.

Similar work has been done in the study of Christian mission networks working in the trans-border region in Southeast Asia. In the article “*Confinement and Mobility*” Alexander Horstmann (2010) studies the Karen community living along the Thai-Myanmar border in refugee camps. By using Castell’s “social theory” he studies the interconnection of the politics of identity and religious affiliation through the way Karen becoming stateless on the one hand and empowered in Christian networks on the other. Imbibing Christianity liberates and enables them to reclaim their self being. He argues that Christian identity is intimately associated with Karen nationalism and intertwined with the projection of a Karen state. He also looks into the intersection of missionisation process, nationalism and refugees in the making of religious geography. The dynamic process of the socio-religious relationship among the Karen in the refugee camp developed a strong bond and sense of belonging within the members which led to the formation of imagined community. In another interesting study, Michael Eilenberg (2011) in the article “*Straddling the Border*” shows how a remote border district of Kapuas Hulu was caught between macro politics of territoriality and state formation in the Indonesia and Malaysia borderland. Eilenberg looks at how the state implements the importance of religion, or more specifically, “the belief in one God” to assimilate the Iban communities into national ideology. However, according to him despite considerable efforts by the military to win over the minds and souls of the recalcitrant border communities, the nationalist indoctrination largely failed among the majority of the border population. This was largely due to military brutality against the community and the long-term Iban history of self-autonomy. Thus, strong bonding of communities in term of religion is as such

⁴ Shimreiwung (2014), Print culture and the rise of Identity consciousness in oral society. Trajectories in conception of community identity in Tangkhul literature. *In encountering modernity*.pp-154-169.

evidence in the production and reproduction of national identity in the borderland. However, N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hliang, (2007) argues that one aspect of changes in the frontier upland Myanmar post independent is the rapid growth of Christian missionary activity targeting the oppressed minorities. With religious teaching and support for education often in the local language codified for the first time, it laid the seed of imagined community. These works provide important insight in understanding the complex role of religion in colonial societies and the way society has responded to religion in various way both on the colonial and post-colonial.

In recent times, scholars have also used various historical sources to understand the role of Christianity or various missionary agencies, especially through visual images. One such important work is Joy Pachuau and Willem Schendel (2015) *The Camera as Witness* which deals exclusively with the social history of the Mizo through visual anthropology. Through the photographs, the author's traces the coming of Christianity in the Lushai hills and discusses the changes brought in the Lushai hills through their encounter with Christianity. Pachuau gives an alternative gaze towards photographs by studying them as records of 'discursive formation' in colonial and post-colonial knowledge production.

It is widely agreed among many scholars that participation of women in religious affairs indicates the massive contribution made by women not only in the faith of an individual, but more importantly to the socio-cultural and economy of the community. In the context of this study, one can draw important insight from the works of Hyaeweol Choi's article "*The Visual Embodiment of Women in the Korean Mission Field*" (2010) and Saba Mahmood works on *Politics of Piety* (2011). Choi argues that, the majority of "educated" new women in Korea in 20th century had been exposed, directly or indirectly, to Christian mission schools and churches. She suggested that the extensive influence of Christianity had contributed to the shaping of the modern Korean woman. Drawing from post-colonial and feminist readings, Choi's study emphasized on the power of missionaries and the politics of gender. She argued that the concept and idea of a womanhood changes, which is directly linked to the interaction of the traditional Korean concept of womanhood and the concept of womanhood advocated by the Christian. Saba Mahmood on the other hand critiques the discourse of western scholarship in representing the Islamic women through an

ethnographic account of an urban women's mosque movement in Egypt in Cairo. She asserts that the piety movement produces new forms of social ability and new ways of expressing women's interest within the structure. In other words, she argues that the agency of women is based on the context rather than fixed.

Another important aspect of the study is that the Tangkhul villages straddles the India and Burma border. Understanding this borderland characteristic is important in the study of North East India, especially on the Tangkhul community. Studies on border, boundaries and borderland in the context of the Tangkhul community is a recent phenomenon. Among the Tangkhuls, each village has a distinctly self-sufficient and self-administered unit. Village boundary, therefore, is well demarcated by rivers, streams, ridges and in some cases by putting a boundary stone. The descriptive work in the study of indigenous boundary making system is evident in the work of A. Nshoga in "*Tradition Naga Village system and its Transformation*" (2013) and Ruivah (1993). Nshoga asserted that the Naga village boundaries generally demarcated by the erection of boulders along the border area or by streams, rivers, ridges or mountain ranges. The inter-village border in the Naga society is however not a static line. Ruivah also demonstrates how the boundary making in the Tangkhul society is done through divine sanction which involves elders and the priest by slaughtering of animal and smearing of the blood on the boundary stone. Though the boundary is not static, the Tangkhul Naga villages have well demarcated land and they do not encroach upon other's boundary. These notion of space however underwent changes when the European form of cartography and ideas of border were imposed by the colonial regime and was subsequently adopted in the formation of the Indian state. This imposition of an alien border making system undermined the existing native understanding of border. As a result, inter-intra ethnic and state conflicts emerged regarding territoriality. The borders became zones where the power and control of one state ends and the other begins. It has also become symbolic spaces where socio-economic and political contests of inclusion and exclusion are played out every day. Paula Banerjee in her study in "*Border, Histories, Existence*" (2016) argues how the ideas of the border were imposed on and subsequently internalised in South Asia with very definite implications for state formation in the region. Thus, the emergence of borders and boundaries often led to the contestation among the borderland communities.

The Indo-Burma border is an evolving border, which involves diverse stakeholder and agencies. The making and unmaking of the border in the region remain contested within a diverse ethnic group. Archana Upadhyay in her work *The Dynamics of Terrorism in North East India* (2009) examines North East India borderland through security perspective. She looks into the nature and the factor of insurgent conflict in the region. The region as a periphery and interconnected to the international border serves as insurgents' safe haven for various emerging groups causing instability to the structure and system of the state. However, her usage of insurgency in an equation with terrorism is problematic.

Studies also show how borders become the marker of an essential modern sovereign territorial state and state making system. Paula Banerjee (2016) in her book *Border, Histories, Existence: Gender and Beyond* provide the historical background of border demarcation in the region and its impacts on the relations among the nation-states. By looking at borders through a critical feminist theory, she conceptualises security/insecurity of vulnerable communities living along the borderland. She raises the questions of women experiences in India's borderland and how women's bodies are caught in the dialectic between the structure of the state and the security. Bannerjee also discusses the border laws in the North East India region and how it increases the geographical horizon of control in the border region. David Gellner's *Border Lives in Northern south Asia* (2013) looks into the state and non-state perspective in the borderland through anthropological and ethnographic approach. In his work, the native view of the border was examined and interrogated focussing on the border-landers in South Asia. Gellner asserted that borderland is a site of contradiction and opposition between state and the borderland society, where the issue of livelihood, belonging and allegiance is complex⁵. Studies on borderland in North-East India are as such looked largely through the prism of state security centric, identity, economic and development perspective. In a way, they also highlight the array of governmental designs aimed to control the mobility of the people, services and goods.

⁵ David Gellner's (2013) *Border Lives in Northern south Asia*.

An important shift in the scholarship on borderland studies in Northeast India took place post 2000's. This period witnessed the study of boundaries and border from territory to development and identities. Sanjib Baruah in his work *Durable Disorder* (2005) investigates the way in which discourse of development makes its way in Northeast India at large by interrogating how this idea of development is closely linked to the notion of nationalizing space. Through the national security driven process, the central government push forward their policy to control the economically dependent state by giving economic incentives. Baruah also looks into the power relation between the state and the central government and argues that Northeast states should be given a transnational role in reformulating 'Look East Policy' to revive cultural, economic and historical ties with South East Asia. Joy Pachuau (2014) indicates the dynamic relationship between 'mainland India' and 'Northeast India' and shows how the 'differences' shape the identity formation. She asserts that identity is not given and fixed rather it is a process renewed through constant production and reproduction of historically-evolved material and discursive practices.

From the discussion above, studies on borderland have provided a range of perspective on borders and borderland communities. Having said that, the India and Burma borderland has not been a popular subject for research and analysis among the scholars. Thus, while existing borderland debate in the region is taken into account, this research is an attempt to extend beyond the conventional studies of the borderland in the academic discourse such as –security paradigm, economic, illegal trade, armed and proliferation, intergroup conflict, land conflict, human trafficking, smuggling drugs, presence of refugees and challenges of migration, and spreading of epidemics etc. This study will focus specifically on the Tangkhul community that straddle the India and Burma border and see how the Tangkhuls in India and Tangkhuls in Burma, separated by the existence of the international boundary are connected by the cultural, political and religious entities. It will examine how Christian missionaries play a vital role in the formation of collective and inclusive political identity which further contributed to spreading consciousness among the Tangkhuls beyond the state constructed borders. It also explores the role of mission networks or association in the presentation, culture reinforcement and in the process reconnecting the community across the border while discussing everyday forms of mobility such as trade, social,

cultural and religious event that shape the cultural connectedness across the transnational boundary. This study also explores the role and contribution by the women in local and cross border mission projects, and how they claim their space in the existing social structure using their experiences gained through mission and evangelising projects.

Research Methodology

This research is based on 60 days of intensive fieldwork taken up during 2017 and 2018 at Ukhrul district in India (Ukhrul town and Northern region) and Somra Khullen village in Burma. In this research, I will be using an interdisciplinary approach. This includes unstructured interview or conversation with the church and association leaders, missionaries and students from various Somra villages in Ukhrul. I choose the unstructured interview method because this will help the respondent speak and represent in their own self. Primary and secondary sources will be used for critical engagement in theoretical analysis. Primary qualitative data is used since it is collected through more interactive and unstructured approach. This will reduce the gap between researcher and respondent in the field. Mission association reports, history, souvenir etc., were collected from Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (TBCA), Tangkhul Naga Baptist Convention (TNBC), and Northern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (NTNBA) and Indo-Myanmar Border Mission Project Ukhrul. Secondary reading is also used to develop a theoretical framework and get insight on the research theme.

As a member of the community, there is both positive and negative side in my research. As an insider understanding the local values, formal and informal power structure, cultural practices, and social relationship within the community enabled me to access the field and added positive aspect to the studies. Some disadvantages are: overlooking certain routine behaviour, making the assumption about the meaning of events and not seeking clarification. The researcher tends to assume that the context of the events, narrative or experiences presented by the insider are also understood by the outsider in the same manner. However, the researcher takes ample precaution and aim to represent the Tangkhul community objectively.

Most of the conversation was held in the association centre, school campus, chai store etc. Observation technique and semi-structured interview have been utilized through informal conversation and interaction generated through my participation in the daily life of the community and religious events. All the conversation were in Tangkhul *tui* (language) and had to be translated into English. As a Non-Native English speaker, certain nuances in my work might have been lost in the process of translating.

In this research, I focused my study on the American Baptist Christian mission as it was the first Christian mission that arrived in the Tangkhul hills. Majority of the Tangkhul constitute member of the above mentioned denomination. Alongside, I also look into two major mission networks i.e., Baptist Mission and Baptist Women Mission⁶ to understand the function of the mission network and their role in connecting the community. The context and the history of other Christian denomination in the Tangkhul hills required different trajectories to study. Therefore, to narrow it down and to carry out research within the stipulated time and limited resources, I chose to focus on the Baptist mission networks for this M.Phil dissertation.

The problem that I encountered during the research in a community like the Tangkhul is that each and every village has a unique democratic system of governance that manages its own affairs besides having diverse language. The social and cultural practices are widely different from region to the region despite having basic commonalities. Another aspect is that Tangkhuls in Burma use Burmese script as a form of writing which is unintelligible to me. Another important aspect is that despite the existence of apex body association for the American Baptist Christian in the Tangkhul hills, the association does not have direct control over the church i.e. each and every church manages their own affairs.

⁶ For this study, in order to accommodate all the mission associations such as Tangkhul Baptist Association, Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association, Somra Tangkhul Baptist Association and other cluster or regional associations, I will be using the term Baptist mission network, but while discussing about a specific association, I will use the nomenclature such as Tangkhul Baptist Association, Tangkhul Naga Baptist association etc. the same will also apply for women mission associations. I will also use Christian mission Networks and Tangkhuls associations interchangeably.

Organisation of the Dissertation

This study is arranged into three chapters. The Chapters broadly deal with the Tangkhul community and their engagement with Christianity, mission networks and their role in common identity formation. The first chapter titled **‘Tangkhuls and their engagement with Christianity and colonialism: historical overview’** examine the coming of Christianity in the Tangkhul hills. Aspects such as the process of conversion, spatial change, education, evangelising and the role of indigenous leadership in evangelising process and its impact in the society are discussed. It focuses on the way in which Tangkhuls responded to Christianity and how new ideas and worldviews were brought by the American Christian missionaries. In the processes of transition, there is negotiation and resistance by the community while others gradually adapted to the changes. I argue that various practices such as print culture, education and formation of Christian association made an important role in forming common identity within the Tangkhul community.

The second chapter is titled **‘Borderland dynamics: Religion and community identity in Contemporary Tangkhul community’**. This chapter broadly examines the significant role of Christianity and the religious networks in the making of common ethnic identities among the Tangkhul community. This chapter will also look into the contemporary mission networks that operate across the border by engaging in cross-border cultural activities—evangelism, modern education etc., by focusing on the role of the native churches’ engagement in expanding the religious geography which enables the formation of common identity across the borderland. It is also an attempt to look into the intersection of cultures, Christianity, school, education and religious meeting which enables in reproducing identity consciousness in the contemporary Tangkhul society. It also aims to study the role of mission networks or association in the enactment, culture reinforcement and in the process of reconnecting the community across the border. It will also look into the everyday forms of mobility such as trade, social, cultural and religious event that shape the cultural connectedness across the transnational boundary.

The third Chapter is titled, **‘Women in mission: Women emancipation and changing configuration in religious space’**. This chapter studies the growing role of women in church and its significance in the nation making process and also new ways of representing women within the structure in the pursuit of imagined community. This chapter explores the role and contributions of women in local and cross border mission projects. It attempts to look at how women reclaim their space in the existing social structure using their experiences gained through mission and evangelising projects. Thus, the Tangkhul’s encounter with Christianity not only developed common identity consciousness but also new ways of representing women within the structure.

Chapter 1

Tangkhuls and their engagement with Christianity and colonialism: A historical overview

Introduction

This chapter is a historical overview of the Tangkhul community and their engagement with colonialism and Christianity. It explores the historical trajectories of the American Baptist Mission and discusses the associational and transnational mission network that emerged in the Tangkhul hills. In 1890, Revd. William Pettigrew arrived in India under the aegis of Arthington mission with the aim to ‘civilize the savage’. He worked for two years in Bengal¹. His arrival in the Tangkhul hills in 1896 led to the establishment of American Baptist mission and initiated mission work². He sought to achieve this through the establishment of schools and engaged in various other philanthropic work. Modern education brought by the Christian missionaries, the introduction of print culture and the formation of Christian mission associations shaped the foundation of a common ethnic identity formation among the Tangkhuls. People who were geographically separated by state borders came into contact with each other and established existing relations which were fostered and sustained by socio-political and cultural circumstances. This cultural contact and interactions between the colonial power, Christian missionaries and the Tangkhuls set in motion major socio-cultural changes within the community. While on the one hand, Christianity promoted ‘cultural dynamism’ and connectedness among the Tangkhuls, it also divorced them in many ways. In this mutually transforming play of social forces, outcomes are neither linear nor simply overdetermined. Some educated elites adopted Christianity while many other resisted. Thus, the encounter between Christianity and the Tangkhuls involved a continuous process of interpretation and reassessment. This process of negotiation led to the formation of a certain form of identity or identity consciousness based on common moral values and aspirations. Benedict Anderson has called this phenomenon as

¹ Singh Leiren (1996) *William Pettigrew and Modern education in Manipur*. Imphal.p-7.

² *Ibid*; P-7

“imagined communities”³, where specific groups share the same sense of a ‘nationally-imagined community’ (Anderson, 1987).

Encounter with Colonialism and Christianity

Manipur was an independent kingdom before the emergence of British colonial rule. The numerous hill ‘tribes’ were considered as almost entirely independent and in constantly at ‘feud’ among themselves and with Manipuri (Brown, 1874:71). The Meitei Maharaja Bhaigyachandra came into formal relation with British in 1762 by signing a treaty, when the Maharaja asked British aid to repel the Burmese invasion. Constant Burmese aggression towards the Meitei Kingdom compelled the Maharaja to seek alliance with the British. However, the British intention was to use the Meitei kingdom as a pawn in the ‘Asian Chessboard of imperialism’ (Dena, 2012:10-15). Therefore, the colonial agents allying themselves with the Manipuri Raja in order to drive out the Burmese and protect the North East Frontier was followed by the establishment of the British political agent office in 1835. Subsequently, Captain Gordon was appointed as the political agent of Manipur (Lolly, 1985:14). In 1833, the Meitei Maharaja made a Treaty with the British government of India, mainly for trade and military alliance between the Manipur and the British Governments (Lolly, 1985:14). In the aftermath of the death of Chandra Kirti Singh in 1886, there was a contestation among the princes over the kingship. As a consequence, Anglo- Manipuri war took place in 1891 in which seven British officials were killed. After the military expedition, Manipur came under direct British Administration from 1891 until 1907⁴. As a result, after the Anglo-Manipur War in 1891, the British control over the state became more prominent.

The British government decided to preserve the existence of the state and the position of the Maharaja. However, the administration of the state was entrusted to the superintendent and the political agent as the Raja was a minor at that time. By taking this opportunity, the British political agent took initiatives in social reform, abolished slavery, unpaid labour etc., and they also made extensive reorganisation in the government administration. The state boundaries were fixed, a road was build

³ I am not using the term imagined community in the form of ‘imaginary’ i.e. formation of imaginary community without common history.

⁴ *Ibid* ; pp-16-17

connecting Imphal with Kohima. Though the government of the state was handed over to the Rajah and Durbar, the British retained extensive power whereby, i) the highest court of the state, was always to be an English Indian civil services officer. He also was the responsible for the administration of the hill areas and all matters related to finance. ii) All the judgement by the Durbar involving death penalty had to be confirmed by the governor of Assam. Through this measure British government captured the political power of Manipur⁵.

In administering the hills, the British political agents recognised the chiefs of the hills and their authorities. Hence, they enjoyed considerable power and privilege within their chiefdoms. The hill territories were separated from the general administration of the valley by the colonial agents. After 1880, with the permission of Maharaja Kumar Singh, the British political agent established police *Thana* at Paoyi, Yangpokpi, Khangkhui, Phungcham, Chatric, Kongkan, Nungchan and Sina Keithei villages to mark the consolidation of British control over Tangkhul Hills. Although many historians claim that the colonial administrator or other external forces did not decisively conquer the Tangkhul community, there is no doubt that the socio-political structure of the Tangkhuls became weaker and the need for political unity became imperative. Consequently, with the establishment of police *Thana*, the new form of heavy taxation including house tax and free and forced labour known as *Pothang* was imposed among the people in few of the Tangkhul villages (Shinglai, 2015:37). The amount of Rs.3/- as tax per household were collected for the maintenance and expenditure of the administration rather than development purpose (Thomas, 2016:62).

In this wider political-economic context and circumstances, we can situate the arrival of William Pettigrew in Manipur. Pettigrew arrived in India under Arthington Aborigines mission society named after the Millionaires Robert Arthington in 1890 (Dena, 1988:32). “Pettigrew was drawn by the audacity of Meitei’s to take on the might of the British in the Anglo- Manipuri war, in which seven British officials were

⁵ Lal Dena (2012). *History of Modern Manipur (1762-1949)* pp-1-30. Also see *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A study of Missionary Movement in North East India with Particular reference to Manipur and Luishai Hills 1894-1947*.pp-1-26. R.R Lolly (1984) *the Baptist Church in Manipur* pp 1-17. Federick S. Downs (1983). *Christianity in North East India: Historical Perspective*.pp-36-48.

killed by the Manipuris. Thus, he applied for permission to enter the state to work among the Manipuri Hindus” (Solo & Mahangthei, 2006: viii). In 1893, permission was granted by A. Porteous, the acting British political agent during the absence of Mr. Maxwell the then political agent. Pettigrew arrived in Imphal in 1894, the capital of the state, and began his work by opening a school for Manipuri boys (Luikham, 2011:61). Manipuris had already embraced Vaishnavism Hindu as a principal religion by the royal edict since 1705 (Dena, 1988:31). As a result, the Hindu Meitei took Pettigrew’s teaching as a deliberate attempt to impose upon them the ‘government’s religion’ (Dena, 1988:33; Thomas, 2016:25). Thus, when Major Maxwell returned from furlough, he decided against allowing mission work among the Manipuri Hindus in the valley as he did not want to disturb the relation with the Maharaja. Moreover, the existing social policy of British India after the revolt of 1857, particularly in the matter of religion was apparently in strict neutrality. Another important aspect is that the particular power enjoyed by the colonial political agent in administering the state on behalf of the then minor Raja made them hesitant to interfere in the religion of the people. Consequently, Major Maxwell served an ultimatum to Pettigrew to leave Imphal valley or stop his missionary work in order to maintain tranquillity among the Meitei’s (Thomas, 1988:34).

Later, Pettigrew was given permission to take up work, “at his own risk” among the Tangkhuls in the hills to the North East of Imphal which is under the direct British administration⁶. The British political agent permitted Christian missionaries in evangelizing mission primarily among the hills, where no political-religious loyalties towards the states were involved. The missionary presence, was particularly in educating, disciplining and to modernise or ‘civilise’ of the hills in Manipur. Therefore, the colonial officials permitted and supported missionary enterprises in the Tangkhul Hills. Pettigrew (**figure 2**) chose Ukhrul as his mission station rather than Paoyi village as suggested by Porteous⁷. However, the Arthington Mission which sponsored Pettigrew was not in a position to establish mission stations in any particular place for a long period of time. Robert Arthington believed in mobile missionary movement where his strategy was that “if a Christian foothold was gained

⁶ Jonah M.S & Mahangthei K. (2006). *Forty years mission in Manipur: mission report compilation*. Preface.

⁷ *In the official tours Dairy June 5th, 1893 Monday by Mr. A Porteous.*

in any country that was enough for him, he would press on to the next country” (Dena, 1988:37). Hence, he applied for the membership in American Baptist Missionary Union in Assam. In 1895, he was ordained as an American Baptist Foreign Mission Union (ABMU) missionary in Sibsagar. Later, in 1896, he was appointed as a missionary⁸. Although Pettigrew dream of proselytizing the Meitei’s did not materialize, Pettigrew initiated changes among the hill people.



Figure 2: Statue of Reverend William Pettigrew at *Hunphun* Ukhrul. The statue also depicts the symbolical meaning of how missionary brought ‘light’ in the Tangkhul hills.

Schools and Education

During the early days of work, Pettigrew engaged in the construction work of the mission Bungalow, studying the local dialect and doing translation works⁹. A Middle English school (**figure 3**) was opened at Ukhrul on February 19, 1897, with 24 boys whose ages ranged from 7-14 years (Solo & Mahangthei, 2006:12-13). Pettigrew was

⁸ White Paper for Tangkhul Baptist Church: Oneness and Wholeness produced and published by the Executive Council Tangkhul Baptist Churches association, Ukhrul 2005.

⁹ *The Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U 1899. Reported from the Tangkhul Naga Field by Revd. W. Pettigrew.*

the head teacher and he was the head of everything in the school¹⁰. Pettigrew had the option of choosing Bengali script, which was used in the schools in the valley and the Roman script. However, Pettigrew chose the latter for the reason that the students would be able to learn, read and write in the vernacular language as well as English. Pettigrew's report in 1896 states: "Bengali would be of little use to them, so it has been discarded, although it might be worthwhile later on to teach them the character, for the purpose of reading Manipuri, a language they are familiar with"¹¹. However, the primary aim of Pettigrew was to make the Tangkhuls inculcate Christianity, as reading the Bible is an intrinsic part of the Protestant doctrine. It became important for him to train the local people how to read and write. The students were also taught the practical skills such as carpentry, metal work, etc., thereby enabling them to make modern furniture (Dena, 1988:37). Hence, material improvement and mission work were closely related in the missionisation process and such material comforts acted as means for the furtherance of missionary work.

The students going to school were exempted from the labour villagers were required to offer whenever government officers toured the area (Dena, 1988:92). Thus, the government coerced parents to send children to school. The missionary and the colonial agent served each other interdependently in penetrating their policy in the hills. Therefore, missionary expansion in the Tangkhul Hills was greatly facilitated through association with the colonial government agencies.



Figure 3: The first school in Ukhrul established in 1897. (Solo & Mahangthei, 2006).

¹⁰ Forty years mission in Manipur. Mission Reports of Revd. William Pettigrew p-13.

¹¹ *Ibid*,22

The school became the contact zone between missionary and the students from different Tangkhul villages and communities. It also emerged as a place to train future leaders. The student of class-VI of the Ukhrul Center School served as teachers to the village school. In his report for the Years 1907–1909 to Assam Baptist Mission Union (ABMU) Pettigrew reported that, “while the colonial state paid the salaries of teachers in the villages of the hill tribes (Nagas) mission school gave prize money of 3 rupees to every boy or girl as scholarship, the missionary gratuitously supervised the teachers’ work, and did inspections of the schools twice every year. The literature provided for the schools was prepared by the missionary, the cost of the same being borne by the State”¹². The students who got an education in Pettigrew mission school converted to Christianity. “The school and church records indicate 95 percent of the students who had passed through this school converted to Christianity”¹³. Therefore, it became the ‘contact zone’ of missionaries and the native.

In 1911, when the government took the census of Manipur state, William Pettigrew was made the superintendent of the census operation because the missionary was the only person who knew the language of the hill tribes (Thomas, 2016:26; Shimray, 2003:6-9). Thus, while Pettigrew served as the missionary, he also simultaneously engaged in officiating colonial state official in all matter concerning the day to day administration of the hills. The teacher in the mission school and higher class Christian student also served as enumerators and supervisors. Similar assistance was given to the government census of 1921 and 1931¹⁴. The census work gave an opportunity to spread Christianity. Census also marked the beginning of the extension of formal administration from Manipur state to the hills of the Nagas and Kukis, and thereby the official incorporation of these hills to the pre-existing native kingdom of Manipur.

When the Tangkhul hills were converted into a subdivision by the British Raj, many students of the missionary school served as peons, *lambus*, road *mohoris* and supervisors, vaccinators and compounders to their respective dispensaries and hospital. The students were being paid money for their services (Dena 1988:94). The

¹² All Nations, July 1907 Itinerating in the Tangkhul Naga Country, Assam, India by Revd. William Pettigrew.

¹³ *My Twenty Five Years (1897-1922) at Ukhrul Mission School (p-xix)* by Revd. William Pettigrew

¹⁴ *My twenty-five years 1897-1922 at Ukhrul mission school by Revd. Pettigrew. p-xix*

tour enabled the missionary to tour Ukhrul and other unvisited neighbouring villages which later favoured in the expansion of his mission. Khaiyar Gachui was among the students who passed out from Jorhat Mission School and later worked as a medical compounder in Burma which enabled him to tour Burma and introduce the gospel among the Nagas in Burma (Gachui, 2010). Students who were educated in mission schools also served as interpreters during World War II. Christopher Grimson, the Political Agent of British Government appointed students of Jorhat Mission School returnee as interpreters from the different group of Indian Refugees coming from Burma. Their main duty was to make enquiry and find grievances of the refugees. Among them were Yangmaso Shaiza (Ukhrul side) and R.S Azum (Somra side). These interpreters played an important role as instructors, distributing the work and duties amongst the refugees and also helping them to find a way to India through different routes. They also distributed foods, clothes and medicine to the war affected areas (Shishak, 1996:19).

During World War I, when there was a need for the labour Corps recruitment for services in France, J. C Higgins, the then president of Manipur state Durbar, sought Pettigrew's help in persuading the people in the hills for labour as they refuse to go to faraway land. Through his missionary influence, Pettigrew successfully recruited 2000 men among whom 1200 were Tangkhuls under the leadership of his six (6) trusted church leaders and students in 1917 (Wungnaoyo, 2011:11-12). William Pettigrew writes, "The writer feels in his own mind that if such a scheme had been put in 1897 instead of 1917, no one would have been willing to go"¹⁵. The people who went to France encountered a new culture, people of different races, and new experiences. This enabled them to connect Pettigrew's teaching in a larger context. For instance, a remark made by one France labour corps member returnee to Pettigrew reads as follows: "We had little faith in your stories of land across the ocean and sea, people who believed in Christ. We have seen the emblem of the cross over the thousands of grave on the battlefield and beautiful gravestone on the graveyard of France". Pettigrew also added that the message of the cross is now being listened by the Tangkhul Naga young men and women¹⁶. Thus, exposure to the outside world

¹⁵ My Twenty Five Years (1897-1922) at Ukhrul Mission School (p-ix) by Reverend William Pettigrew

¹⁶ Ibid:,14

enabled them to connect to the outside world and embrace Christianity in a broader way.

The missionaries and the colonial administration thus served each other to establish their power in the hills. The interest of the colonial official towards the education of the hill people might not be religious oriented in nature. As Dena argued that “the colonial imperialistic nature drives them to support the education as they understood that the education imparted by the missionaries was effective not only in civilizing the native but also in making them loyal subject” (Dena, 1988:90). The missionaries and the colonial officials were as such interdependent and used each other for their benefits on various occasions. While colonial officials looked at the introduction of western education as the legitimate process of colonial rule, the missionaries used it as the vehicle for communicating the Christian message to the subject¹⁷.

Women’s Education

The parents and village elders were anxious about women going to school, as they considered that it will disturb the existing structure of labour division and political economy of the village. Therefore, it was difficult for the missionary to convince the women as they were mostly engaged in the domestic work, paddy field, but most importantly leaving a home became a big question for women. According to the *Chingjui Village Baptist Church Gospel Centenary History* (2011) in 1906, four women enrolled in the Chingjui Baptist village school and later in 1908 in Ukhrul Mission School¹⁸. The women were taught not only pedagogical knowledge but also were taught to inculcate knowledge of cleanliness, the art of knitting, gardening, weaving, stitching etc. The objective of women education according to the report is to help women to become a ‘complete women’, useful and active citizen, and spread modern education while retaining the culture of the people to the fullest (Khayl, 1996:28).

In order to fit into the existing structure, Alice Pettigrew opened a night school for women. The fourteen women student who studied in the mission centre school

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14

¹⁸ *Chingjui Village Baptist Church History (Gospel Centenary) (2011). Published by Chingjui Baptist Church.*

converted to Christianity in 1909 and later became active in their local church activities¹⁹. In 1915, Alice Pettigrew established ‘Kindergarten Girls School’. The expenditure of the school was borne by the American Baptist Mission²⁰. Mrs. Charani who was among the first batch of women student served as the first lady teacher. Ms. Surila Malung served as the matron cum teacher in the women hostel.

The Missionary School was later shifted to Kangpokpi Centre. The progress of World War II towards the Ukhrul led to the closure of mission school (Luikham, 2011:66). Among the students in the Kindergarten Girls’ school, two women were already married when they enrolled in the school²¹. In 1922, seven women were sent to Nowgong, Golaghat and Guwahati for nurse training, and later served as teachers in the missionary school²². The establishment of the girl’s school in Kangpokpi with the permanent girl’s hostel enabled women from diverse communities to come to this centre to get education, thereby enhancing the ties between different communities.

In 1932, a total of 24 Tangkhul young women, 24 Kom, Anal and Thadou Kuki girls attended the school in Kangpokpi. Alice Pettigrew found out every possible way to uphold and educate the girls. Funded by the Women Baptist Foreign Society (WBFS), students were given a scholarship of 3 rupees per month, enabling them to pursue their schooling away from home²³. In the 1934 report, Pettigrew writes that “until 1932 there were more men than women Christians. Today women outnumbered men in the membership of our Baptist church”²⁴. This indicates that women played an active role in the conversion and spreading of Christianity in Manipur. Among the women who got an education in the mission school, Ms. Pamleiphi became the first women MBBS and served as Doctor in the Manipur state. Mrs. Shining became the first women pastor in Tangkhul and later became the first women Member of Legislative Assembly in Manipur²⁵. Alice Pettigrew’s students served in various other

¹⁹ *TBCA Women Union wui Kasha –A Thotchan (2018). Published by TBCA women centenary committee. P-7.*

²⁰ *Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association Women Union pre -centenary souvenir 1917-2012. P-19.*

²¹ B. Bellee School inspection note 11th May 1920.

²² *Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association women Union Pre- Centenary Souvenir (1917-2012). Published by TBCA women Union*

²³ *TNBC Women History, M.S Ningmasai, 1968. p-1*

²⁴ *TBCA women centenary History (1917-2018). Published by TBCA women Union. Ukhrul*

²⁵ *Tangkhul Baptist Church Association women union pre-Centenary Souvenir (1917-2012). Published by TBCA women Union. p-40.*

fields, for instance, during the World War I when the menfolk went as volunteers of Labour Corps in France, the womenfolk look after the family and gave emotional support to maintain tranquillity in the society. Similarly, during World War II, the former students of Alice Pettigrew served as nurses and gave assistance in many possible ways. For instance, Ms. Sarengla a nurse student returnee from Jorhat Mission Hospital served as a nurse to the Japanese retreating soldier who was wounded during the 1944 Kohima battle along with medical officer Honsha Masata in Kharasom Village of present-day Ukhrul district. When all the retreating Japanese soldier passed Ukhrul on their way to Burma she was handed over to the parents by the medical officer as he had promised. She also served in the Indian Military Hospital, Imphal (Shishak, 1996:39). Later, they played an active role in the formation of Tangkhul women convention and Tangkhul *Shanao Long* (Tangkhul women organisation). In this way, Christianity and modern education propagated by the missionaries laid the foundation for initiating various socio-political and human rights movement.

Medical Mission

Usually, all western missionaries were given some training in biomedicine before their departure for the mission work. Medical work in Manipur was first initiated by Alice Pettigrew. She was trained in medicine and Nursing at Sussex County Hospital, England. Later, Alice was joined by Pettigrew who took a two years course at Livingstone Medical College, London during his furlough²⁶. Alice's contribution to the missionisation process is widely seen through her medical knowledge and skill she possessed. William Pettigrew writes in his 1896 report, "the missionary's wife takes over medical department during the year, and ever since, many more were reported to come for medicine; with success in some difficult case. The fame of her also spread to the nearby village, thereby people came to her for medication"²⁷. Pettigrew also engaged in giving out medicines apart from assisting the state officials in the day to day administration of the hill area. As Pettigrew writes in his 1899 report: "The medicines used have mostly been given by the state through the charitable dispensary. Keeping self-support in view, the missionary has declined to give medicine for free,

²⁶ *Forty years in Manipur, Assam: An account of the work of Revd. and Mrs William Pettigrew. Prepared by Mr. Pettigrew, March 1934 pp-90-91.*

²⁷ *The Baptist Missionary Magazine Vol. LXXX, 1900. Ukhrul -1896 by Revd. Pettigrew.p-26.*

hence charged a trifle in shape of eggs. It is also to teach the villager to see that they must not rely on the missionary funds for their living”²⁸. During the cholera outbreak in 1898, Pettigrew uses his medical knowledge as a strategy to get closer to people. The missionary took the chance to entice the hill people who were affected by the disease of which indigenous healing proved ineffective. The experience and forces of the circumstance also made the missionary realize that saving souls must be accompanied by saving of the bodies (Dena, 1988:105).

Diseases such as malaria, fever, cholera, dysentery, tuberculosis which the local people called plague was rampant among the hills were mostly transmitted from the colonial agencies. The people initially refused to take medicines as they were afraid to offend the spirit. However, when Alice successfully nursed and healed a Naga blacksmith who had been terribly burned in the explosion, many of the Nagas were later convinced of the effectiveness of medicines and treatment (Chawnghranga, 1996:91-92). Therefore, the medical mission is called “double cure” among the late nineteenth century missionaries, as it is the twofold healing of the body and the soul (Sharma, 2017:38).

In 1906, William and Alice Pettigrew after returning from their furlough, build a four-room permanent dispensary. In 1920, when the Government of Manipur made Ukhrul as the Sub-Division headquarter, a permanent hospital was constructed²⁹. With the help of one sub-assistant surgeon and compounder, medical work was carried out again which the missionaries started so many years before³⁰. With the transfer of mission headquarters at Kangpokpi in 1917, Dr. G.G Crozier was transferred from Tura, Garo hills to open a new mission hospital at Kangpokpi: “The doctor service was pressed into the British forces and Dr. Crozier rendered valuable services in saving the life of wounded soldiers. In appreciation of his services, the British government and the Maharaja of Manipur allowed him to start mission station on the western side of Dimapur road” (Chawnghranga, 1996:92).”Since the resignation of the Crozier in 1931, medical work is carried out by Dr. Along with Mrs. Werelius. In

²⁸ *The Assam Mission of the ABMU, 1899. Report from the Tangkhul Naga Field by Revd. W. Pettigrew.*

²⁹ *Forty years in Manipur, Assam: An account of the work of Revd. And Mrs William Pettigrew. Prepared by Mr. Pettigrew, March 1934 p-91.*

³⁰ *Ibid:90*

1932, 5352, out-patient and 258 in-patient were treated”³¹. Today this hospital is known as the Kangpokpi Christian Hospital.

The opening of women’s hospital at Guwahati in 1924 and women involvement played a significant role in the medical mission. As with “the Vocational skills, western biomedicine and teachers training, local took opportunities to contact and acquire ‘useful’ modernity” (McKay 2007:40). The students from the mission school were send to this mission Hospital to be trained as nurses for their own hospital and dispensaries. Later, the nurses were prepared for employment in other health centres and in turn they spread lessons of hygiene and other related issues. In this way, many people were converted to Christianity besides, it also proved crucial to social mobility.

The Changing Dynamic of Tangkhul Society

According to Austin-Broos conversion is a “cultural passage, which required to negotiate a place in the world. Thus, it often requires turning away from the old practices and aligning themselves with the new institution, rules and social expectations, while going through the cultural passage” (Austin-Broos, 2003:2). The Tangkhul’s cultural contact with the Christian missionaries led to the concomitant cultural changes which also enabled the emergence of new identities. Christianity offered indigenous populations a ‘modern identity’ (Bal, 2000:155). Their newly found religion paved way for reception and embracement of new ideas. Thus, a new era emerged as the people began to embraced new belief systems, adopted new forms of education by discarding their age-old *long shim* (dormitory) and lifestyles. Monetary systems were introduced in existing local trade, as a result, it led to commercialization of goods, and this led to the gradual destruction of the barter system in trade relations. War and ‘head-hunting’ between the villages disappeared (Horam, 1977; Ruivah, 1993; Shimray, 2001). The introduction of medical work by the missionary also led to the changes in the structure of the society and the traditional belief system. The practices of traditional healing system of which the sickness was healed by the village priest are replaced by the medical doctor and western bio medicine. Thus, there is always a contestation between traditional and modern healing

³¹ *Ibid*:90

system. However, despite western biomedicine produce limited mass conversion among the Tangkhuls, in the beginning, we can say that it is crucial to local acceptance towards Christianity.

Festivals and agriculture among the Tangkhul are interwoven with religious, socio-cultural and everyday life and required the participation of each and every villager. The missionaries restricted the new converts to participate in the ceremonial practices of the village, feast, and festival. They also dissuaded them from meeting many of their customary social and cultural obligations. *Shangkhan* and *Khor*, drinking habit of the Tangkhuls were one of the significant activities missionaries restricted them to participate in the festivals or ritual practices of the village. This discipline of new converts encompasses “disciplinary society”, i.e. the imposition of discipline over individuals soon becomes part of the continual recreation of institutionalizing social bodies (Fife, 2001:55-69).

The changing social, cultural and religious situation in the Tangkhul hills also led to the contestation between the newly converted Christians and the people who practiced the existing belief system. They suffered from the clash between emerging values and the established culture. For instance, the *Kathi Kasham* (Soul departure festival) which is one of the most important practices for the Tangkhul to bid farewell to the souls of the dead was discouraged³². For many years, this was the ritual that wrecked the newly convert Christians as they were unable to pay the fine imposed by the village elders and chief if the newly convert Christian did not fulfil their ritualistic duties. Thus, many returned to the old belief system. However, in the *Kathi kasham* in 1920, the Christian converts in Ukhrul and in the presence of whole village representative unanimously decided to give up and pay rupees 600/- fine imposed to them with the help of the France Labour Corp returnee. As mentioned in Pettigrew’s report (1909) it is considered to be the biggest fine ever instituted in the history of the tribe on anyone who attempted on transgressing traditional practices³³. Thus, the introduction of the monetary system in the Tangkhul society is also evident in the

³² The Baptist Missionary Magazine: Burial among the Tangkhul Naga, March 1909 by Rev William Pettigrew; also see Maiya Gachui (1986) *Hao Miun Ngashan Kala Tangkhul Khrarachan* (History of Tangkhul). pp-51-52;

³³ Ibid.;6

social and structural change. With the exposure to the outside world, the village economy gradually underwent fundamental structural changes.

The non-converts in the village were not willing to ire the gods by practicing Christian rituals. This often led to the exodus of the Christian converts to new locations. Therefore, Christian converts were allocated to new villages at new sites with the help of the colonial political agent and Christian sympathisers. The newly Christian converts faced not only the wrath of his or her family but the entire village. There also emerged a constant contestation between the chief of the village who had the authority to ordain the ritual and the emerging newly converted Christian elite over religious ritual. Further, the existence of the collective decision of the chief of Tangkhul hills is that, if the chief of the village converted to Christianity, he should be removed from his chieftainship. With restrictions placed by the missionaries to the new converts in the participation of existing rituals, there was constant assessment and conflict in the Tangkhul Hills. Later in 1934, the British Political Agent gave an order that every individual have the right to convert to Christianity without any restriction from the chief of the village (Shinglai, 2015:32-35). Therefore, many cases were registered between the newly converted Christians and non-converts during 1920-40s (Shinglai, 2015:19-38). Thus, in order to respond to the conflicting situation, in 1940 a meeting was called by the Tangkhul leaders of various profession and organisation. The meeting was represented by 80 village chiefs in which a collective decision was made in the *Longshim* that the newly convert Christian should not discard the major festival of Tangkhul such as -1) *Luikathui* 2) *Luir* 3) *Maa-machi kata* 4) *Manei* 5) *Yarra* 6) *Mangkhap* 7) *Mawon kazai* 8) *Tharkashat* 9) *Chumph* 10) *Thisham*. However, non-converts should not restrict the guest of the Christian though it is considered to be *Sharra* (taboo) and also Christians have the right to not participate in the ritual³⁴.

“Adopting Christianity and embracing modern education gave status and position to the early converts” (Thakur, 1988:85). Thus, the emergence of the elite group also led to the contestation between the emerging modern elites shaped by modern education, Christianity and existing traditional elite. They were caught in the dialectic of

³⁴ *Ibid*;38

modernity and traditions, indigenous and western thought. This often worked against the traditional rights and privileges of the chief. Thus, realizing the urgency to respond to the socio-cultural and political changes, and also exploitation from external forces, prominent leaders like S. Shangyang and R. Ruichumhao, former Pettigrew students, after returning from France formed a *Longnao* (council/organisation) on 28th December 1928 called Tangkhul Union *long*³⁵ which was a federation of all Tangkhul villages. The objective of this *long* was to preserve the Tangkhul Naga identity and history and also to uphold the solidarity of all Tangkhul Nagas villages with the objective i) to rebuild the Tangkhul Naga family ii) to protect from other war from outsider iii) to safeguard and protect the Naga system and tradition (Shinglai, 2015:33).

In the aftermath of the India independence in 1947, a new form of political movement emerged in the Naga Hills which led to the political contestation between the Indian state and the Nagas. Thus all these new experiences encountered by the Tangkhul community strengthened the new converts and also influenced mass conversion or revival movement by the native post-1950s. Therefore, though pioneer mission was founded by the American Baptist missionaries, it was the early converts, missionary-teachers and government agencies who assimilated the Christian faith and initiated villagers and kinsfolk in the long run supported by the context of that time. The extension of power by external forces, socio-political changes due to encounter with the outside world and constant threat and violence impacted the psyche of the people. Therefore, the undercurrent behind all the movements of apex organisation is a shared vision for a life free from the threat of cultural assimilation and the recognition of their distinct identity.

Literary work and the rise of print culture

The arrival of the British in Ukhrul, in 1891, followed by Christianity in 1896, brought swift radical changes in the livelihood, religion, education system and customary laws of the Tangkhuls. The opening of a school at the Ukhrul headquarter improved inter-village relationship to such extent that students from every part of the district came to Ukhrul to study at Pettigrew's mission school (Luikham, 2011:61-70).

³⁵ The Tangkhul Naga *Long* is the apex body of all the Tangkhul Naga under the traditional system of the Tangkhul Naga people.

The formation of a formal common dialect was a significant factor. In this effort, Revd. William Pettigrew, played a crucial role. Earlier, every Tangkhul villages spoke their own village dialects which were unintelligible to distant villages. William Pettigrew introduced the Roman script as a medium of writing in *Hunphun* dialect. Thus, subsequently, *Hunphun* dialect became the *lingua franca* of the Tangkhul community in India. As A.S. Shimreiwung asserts: “the establishment of the common language for all the Tangkhuls had the massive impact on the psyche of the people on the question of their sense of identity and belongingness” (Shimreiwung, 2014:156). The village oriented identity-based society later expanded into the community-based society.

Some of Pettigrew’s early translations included Gospel of John, Luke, and Acts in 1906, Romans, I and II Corinthians in 1912, Tangkhul Grammar and Dictionary in 1918, while complete translation of New Testament, hymn book with standard tonic sofa, Tangkhul primer, arithmetic and reader for higher class was completed in 1927 (Shimray, 1996). In consultation with the state officials, Pettigrew began to formulate the educational policy for the state. The Political Agent Maxwell later appointed Pettigrew as the Honorary Inspector of Schools by entrusting him with the power to draw up the whole education budget of the state. Many mission schools in Naga villages in colonial Manipur state were run by the joint effort of the American Baptist missionaries and the colonial state. Pettigrew writes in his 1899 report, that “the school at Ukhrul is practically a state school. Nothing is debited to the union (American Baptist mission union) for this school, the missionary gives his time gratuitously. The boys were taught their own language, Manipuri and English. The books they study aim to inculcate Christian truth”³⁶.

The first book introduced by Pettigrew was a school textbook called *Step by Step* (1897) in English. Subsequently, he also published Tangkhul primer in Tangkhul language, consisting first and second premier in 1897 and 1898 respectively, *the New Testament Bible* (1902) and *Hymnals* (1907) in Tangkhul language. These marked the

³⁶ *The Assam Mission of the A.B.M.U 1899 Reported from the Tangkhul Naga Field by Revd. W. Pettigrew.*

gradual social and cultural changes in the society³⁷. One of the important contributions made by Pettigrew was the publication of *Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary* in 1918. The book is written in English but it has Tangkhul words translated into English. This work is considered to be the first work that discusses Tangkhul language in details, its grammatical rules and nuances, and various usages (Shimreiwung, 2013:2). For publication in the early days, Pettigrew relied on the printing house in Calcutta and in London (Shimreiwung, 2014:157). His earlier writing was confined to school text books and Christian text design to use for the public and schools which include the pictorial text of the story of Jesus for the newly converted Christians.

The first Hymnal book translated and printed by Pettigrew in Tangkhul was *Jesu wui Laa Lairik* (books of Jesus Songs), which was a direct translation from Western Church Hymnals. Later, Tangkhul Naga Hymn Book, *Vare wui Laa lairik* etc., were published³⁸. The Hymnal was published at American Baptist Mission House Ukhrul, Assam and printed at Baptist Mission Press Calcutta-Colophon Massachusetts Bible Society in 1907³⁹. Later, The TNBC published the standardised revised edition of the existing Hymnal called *Khokharum Laa* (song of worship) as a standard hymnal which includes the songs that can be related to every aspect of life printed at Baptist Mission Press Kolkata⁴⁰.

The Tangkhul community like many other indigenous people largely communicated through songs. Thus, the production of hymnal also enabled in facilitating and circulating new musical genre among the Tangkhuls. Music served as an important agency in the expansion of knowledge and formation of common identity by unifying ties among the group of people. For instance, as preserved in the collective memories of the Tangkhuls, in the earlier days, the practice of marching among the Christian (singing hymnal while beating *pung*) across the village attracted many people. Therefore, songs and music served as an important tool to connect the people in the hills. Pettigrew translated the meaning of English record songs such as “Glory Song”

³⁷ *Forty Years in Manipur Assam. An account of the Work of Revd. and Mrs. William Pettigrew by William Pettigrew, March 1934 (pp-93).*

³⁸ Tangkhul Baptist *Long Khokharum Laa* (Hymnal) Revised edition (1994)

³⁹ https://archive.org/stream/hymnsintangkhuln00pett/hymnsintangkhuln00pett_djvu.txt.

⁴⁰ *Khokharumla laa* 2013. Published by TNBC.

and “Tell mother I’ll be there”. These songs appealed to them on account of their great fear of death and ignorance of the future life⁴¹. As the Tangkhul community are fond of songs in nature they could effortlessly adapt to the new genre of songs introduced by the Christian missionaries. The hymns were sung in schools, Sunday school, church services and other religious and social gatherings. Later, church choir was formed in every church and they took the leading part in church rituals as the choirs were specialized in singing hymnal. Every member of the Christian Youth Society became active members of the church choir. The usage of hymnal and songs was not only confined to the few literate converted Christian group but also to the illiterate. The importance of education enhanced as they constantly engaged with the text. The various initiatives taken up by the church and the associations such as direct worker conference in each area, conducting area Sunday school examination, choral singing competition arranged for the areas or to the mission centre etc., enabled in consolidating and connecting the entire community, even the far-flung area, where there was no proper road connectivity. Though scholars like Tuisem Ngakang argues that “the cultural contact between the west and the Tangkhul Nagas set the undesirable musical process in motion because it led to the loss of some section of repertoire and partial existing of traditional music of Tangkhul” (Ngakang, 2014:70). Music gave a platform and also served as a vehicle for social change in Tangkhul society. Most importantly it enabled in uniting the newly converted Christian.

The former students later took up literary exercises and also revised the existing work of Pettigrew as there were spelling and tone error in the writings. Tangkhul Literature Society (TSL) was formed in 1938 with the objective to improve and develop the Tangkhul Language, to write about Tangkhuls in greater details in the diverse genre, and to support the education of Tangkhul youngsters up-to University level (Shimray & Maransa, 1993). Later, the society published the first Tangkhul journal called *Zingthanwo* edited by Y. K. Shimray⁴². M. K. Shimray the former student of Pettigrew wrote two books for the first time in Tangkhul, *Jesuwui Khararchan* (in prose) and *Yur Eina Kata Lairik* (Poetry), primarily as textbooks for school and

⁴¹ All nation July, 1907 itinerating in Tangkhul Naga country, Assam, India by Revd. William Pettigrew

⁴² It is said that the magazine was gutted into fire and destroyed during the Japanese war in 1944. The exact content and the years of publication is not known despite many elders and the scholar agree to the existence of the Magazine.

Sunday schools. Later he also wrote Lesson Preparations and Teaching Method (1956), James (Notes) (1956), Hebrews (Notes) (1956), Church History (1957), The Coming of Christ (1958) and Harmony of the Gospel (1960) etc., (Shimray, 1988). Most of his writings were confined to religious writing. Later, Luikham's *Wung-Tangkhul Okthot Mayonza* (Customary Laws, Tradition and Culture) (1961), M. K. Shimray's *Tangkhul Miwurlung* (1967), Shishak's *II World War 1944* (1976), Kanrei's *Tangkhul Khararchan* (1973), *Apuk Apak Ka wui Rai* (First World War) (1974), Gachui's *Hao, Miun Ngashan kala Tangkhul Khararchan* (1986) (The History of Tangkhul), M.W Phanitphang's, *The Naga Script*⁴³ etc., served as historical and customary law handbook. Printed at Imphal, these literature served as an important hallmark in shaping the print culture among the Tangkhuls. Later, writer, like M. Horam's work on *Naga Polity* (1975), *Social and Cultural life of Nagas* (1977) started writing in English with the urgency to revitalize their culture.

The TLS also became the guardian of Tangkhul literature though its main objective was linguistic development. TLS also played a leading role in the demand for recognition of Tangkhul language in the post-independence period. Thus, in 1975, the Manipur Government approved Tangkhul language to be taught in schools in Manipur. Later, in 1985, TLS got the approval to introduce Tangkhul language till Class IX and X and *Meiwon, Wordham Tuitam Khare*, Tangkhul Grammar as text book (Shimreiwung, 2013:75). Today, Tangkhul language is being taught till class XII Board of Secondary Education in Manipur (BOSEM) and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Thus, the emergence of TLS served as an important agent of change in the society which strove to usher modernity while retaining their own culture. Today, the number of publication has increased and various genre in different languages have emerged.

Formation of Christian Associations

The growing increase in the local churches and the widening of the frontier mission movement necessitated the formation of Christian association among the educated converts. The Manipur Christian Association (1917-1928) was formed in November

⁴³ The book does not indicate year of publishing.

1916, the first of its kind. The first convention was held at Phungyo Baptist Church⁴⁴ (figure 4) Ukhrol in 1917. The third association meeting was held at Kangpokpi 1921⁴⁵. However, with the uprising of Christian revival in 1923 led by early native converts, the number of Christians increased in large scale. Thus, in 1929 the single Christian association in Manipur was changed into North East Baptist Association Manipur



Figure 4: Phungyo Baptist Church (The first Baptist church in Manipur) established in 1901.

⁴⁴ The first church in Ukhrol, Manipur established by William Pettigrew.

⁴⁵ *My Twenty Five Years (1897-1922) at Ukhrol Mission School by Reverend William Pettigrew.*

(NEBAM) (1928-1958). This was divided into three centres viz: North East Baptist Association Manipur (present Ukhrul district), Sadar Area Association, and North West Association. Later, in 1958 (September 26-28) NEBAM was changed into Tangkhul Baptist *Long* (TBL), dividing it into four circle centres viz. North, East, West and South affiliated to Manipur Baptist convention (MBC). However, in the 1959 annual meet, the circle centre was changed into Association due to the increase in the number of Christian viz: Northern Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (NTNBA), Eastern Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (ETNBA), Western Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (WTNBA), and Southern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (STNBA).

This association is affiliated to MBC and CBCNEI. In 1959, TBL was renamed into Tangkhul Naga Baptist Churches (TNBC 1959-1983). However, in order to bring all Tangkhul under one umbrella, it was reorganised into TBL (1984-2001). Later, Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (TBCA) was also formed in 2002. Therefore, TNBC and TBCA emerged as the two apex Baptist Christian Association among the Tangkhul. Each village sent two mission workers as representatives to the mission centre to create more connectivity and transparency among the Tangkhul Christian⁴⁶.

The formation of the Christian associations and mission networks in and across the border connected the newly converted Tangkhuls. During a special conference in 1921, the Christians pledged to give 1300 rupees for the evangelical work and the opening up of five new Village School. In 1923, in the new budget, they confirmed to help the Baptist *Long*, which will further influence the missionary in the state. Many people outside the Christian villages and individuals also took a pledge to give 800 rupees⁴⁷. Ten village schools were wholly supported by the association, which also supported seven (7) evangelists out of which five was in North West area and two (2) in North East area of Ukhrul. The mission also supported nine (9) village schools and three (3) teachers at Kangpokpi mission school, and also the Head Master of the Ukhrul Central School and three head evangelist of both the area⁴⁸. Till today, thus

⁴⁶ *Tangkhul Baptist Church Shongza (1896-2011) published by Executive council Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association.*

⁴⁷ *Tangkhul Baptist Church Shongza (1896-2011) published by Executive council Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*:7

mission networks are engaging in various activities to uplift and empower the communities by giving free education, sponsoring missionary, vocational training, organizing the seminar and awareness campaign on various occasion. Thus, the mission networks enhanced the bond among the newly Christian converts through various assistance and support. The association also helped in making modern education accessible by giving free education. The mission network gatherings such as biennial gathering, exchange service, mission conference and other religious activities further enabled them to connect and enhance a sense of belongingness amongst the people. The introduction of Christian associations provided the forum in which representatives of an entire community can be gather and interact.

Baptist Christian Mission in Somra Tract

Revd. William Pettigrew had great desire to extend his mission activities to Somra Tract. However, the state authority of Manipur refused to grant him permission as the border between Manipur and Somra (Burma) did not have clear-cut demarcation⁴⁹. Thus, he encouraged the converted Tangkhuls in Ukhrul to extend the mission to the Somra Tract. In 1931, he sent a missionary-teacher to Somra Tract to spread the gospel and introduce education but also to strengthen the bond between the communities. In 1932, Pettigrew sent Maya (Maiya) Gachui and T. Luikham as evangelist cum teacher from Lunghar and Hunphun village respectively to Somra. Considering himself as one of them, Gachui established a school under the supervision of William Pettigrew while salaries were being borne by the Baptist convention⁵⁰. The school had thirty-one children (31) from around the Somra Phungcham villages. During the time there wasn't any individual who could speak or understand other languages, except for four students who could speak Manipuri. Among them was Mangluba from Somra Phungtret village who could speak Burmese. Evangelist cum teacher Maya was not a trained teacher. However, he learned their native dialect from his students. Thereafter, he gradually taught the gospel to his senior students (Gachui, 1986:18-19).

⁴⁹ The early days of William Pettigrew amongst the Tangkhul by Karam Manimohon Singh.

⁵⁰ *The Baptist missionary review* vol. XXXVIII November, 1932 no.11. Manipur state 1891-1932 by Revd. W. Pettigrew.

William Pettigrew in his report (1891-1932) wrote that “the government of Burma, has during the past year been opened for evangelistic and education work. This work in the Somra tract is controlled and supported by the Tangkhuls and Thoudo Kuki Christians of Manipur, under the supervision of the missionaries in Manipur. Just a few weeks ago our leader got together, and in spite of the economic situation affecting all our Christian communities in Manipur, brought sufficient cash to help support two teachers for Somra Tract during this year”⁵¹. Later, Pettigrew in his report in 1934 writes that “they are now doing foreign mission work of their own. Reports already have come that a number of Somra Tangkhul and Kukis in Burma embracing Christian faith”⁵². However, Maya was evicted from Somra Tract as the Methodist church was already working in the *Chakva*- Burma with the permission of Burmese Government. Therefore, the coming of American Baptist mission in the Somra Tract was disapproved as the government had adopted a policy of allowing only one mission to work in each hill district. Maya along with one of his student called Mr. Theibung returned back to Ukhrul. Theibung studied till class II at Khamasom Phungrei village. He later shifted to Ukhrul and studied till class VI. Subsequently, Theibung (**figure 5**) returned back to Somra as a missionary and converted many people which marked the advent of Christianity in Somra Tract (Luikham, 2011:70). On 3rd July 1945, Yarteo Kaping from Ukhrul was sent to work in Somra Tract. Later he established the school in Kongkailung village (Gachui, 1986:20). In an interview with M. Vasha, he said that “with the help of Phungyo Baptist Church, Bible and hymnal were translated in Somra language (using Burmese script) in between late 1930 to early 1940. However, the exact date and year are uncertain”. Though Hunphun dialect is used as a medium of communication in Ukhrul District in India, Somra dialect is the medium of communication in Somra Tract Burma. Therefore, present day agenda of many religious and social organisation is to use Tangkhul languages as medium of communication all over the Tangkhul inhabitant’s area to connect the Tangkhuls across the border while protecting the village dialect for the same.

⁵¹ *The Baptist missionary review vol. XXXVIII November, 1932 no.11.* Manipur state 1891-1932 by Revd. W. Pettigrew.p-77

⁵² *Ibid:77*



Figure 5: Statue of Church Pioneer Somra Tangkhul in Burma *Awo* V.B. Theibung at TNBA Somra Mission Headquarter (Source: Ninglum Wungkhai).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how Christianity played an important role in the formation of a common identity consciousness among the Tangkhul community which also mediated cultural and political discourse. This consciousness was enabled through modern education, Christianity print culture and formation of associations. Moreover, processes such as conversion, spatial change, education, and the role of indigenous leadership in the evangelising process came to play an important role in shaping the social and political identity among the Tangkhuls. In the next chapter, I will illustrate the significant role of Christianity and the Christian mission networks in the making of common ethnic identity among the Tangkhuls in the post 1990s.

Chapter 2

Borderland Dynamics: Religion and Community Identity in the Contemporary Tangkhul Community

Introduction

In November 2017, a group of womenfolk from Ngachan village of Somra Tract carrying loads of cane basket (*Sopkai/shung*)¹ and piglet (*Hao Hok*)² arrived in Lunghar Village³ to trade and barter with used clothes and traditional shawl especially *Haora Kachon* (a Tangkhul shawl for men)⁴. The faces of the women were coated with sandalwood paste, used as a popular sunscreen in Somra/Burma. They were clothed in thin cotton flower printed *Kashan* (wrap-around) and flip-flop/ sandals. The women of Lunghar village gathered with excitement as if they had been longing for this moment and shouted “*Somra pashi rahaira*”! (The Somra people are here!)⁵—calling out to their neighbours. The women from Somra showcased their cane baskets of different design one after another. Consequently, the womenfolk of Lunghar village were lured by the creativity of the Somra’s traders. As evening drew near, one of the eldest women among the group called Alungwon Horam (Tangkhul name and surname) requested shelter for the night to Ningmasai. Bewildered at first, Ningmasai smiled and said: “*pamkhalailu, ithumva akhana*” (of course, we are one people). She further said that it was her family’s responsibility to give shelter to the womenfolk as her husband is the Assistant Pastor⁶. The above narrative indicates a strong bond between the Tangkhul communities across the border and also innocuous activities manifested through movements of people, circulation of goods and participation in shared cultural worlds, which is further strengthened by the consanguineous relation, cultural and religious alliance. It also designates strong hope of unity in one hand

¹*Sopkai* is one of the most important tools womenfolk used for carrying their cloths and foods during rice planting season. *Shung* is predominantly used during the harvesting season to carry the paddy by womenfolk. For similar studies in cane and bamboo basket in Nagas society see Oppitz, Michael, Thomas Kaiser, Alban Von Stockhausen, and Marion Wettstein. *Naga identities: changing local cultures in the Northeast of India*. Snoeck, 2008.

²*Hao hok* is a smaller breed of pig native to the hill of Tangkhul, especially in Somra. It is predominantly sough as it is easy to raise in their busy rice planting season.

³ Lunghar village is situated in the *Raphei* (northern) region of Ukhrul district in Manipur, one of the border villages between India and Burma.

⁴ Fieldwork note, Lunghar village. November 2017.

⁵ The local people call the Tangkhuls from Burma as Somra.

⁶ There are common practices in the Tangkhul hills that the stranded traveller in the villager were giving shelter in the chief or Pastor Residence.

while it also reflects the asymmetric nature of inter-Tangkhul relation created by the international border, as its citizen remains the subject of two separate nation state.

In a recent study by Markus Viehbeck, he examines the complex cultural history of the Eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong and its neighbours as a history of encounters by using Mary Louise Pratt's theory of "contact zone" i.e., "space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict often in the context of highly asymmetrical relation of power, such as the colonial state and the colonized" (Veibeck, 2007:7-8). The study further draw attention to the role of Christian missionary education and identity formation by emphasising on the agency of individuals, focusing on their role in connecting the communities and the dynamics of various types of contact i.e. as a link, bringing together larger-scale issues-the more general social, political, or economic developments. For instance, Jayeeta Sharma (2017) highlight on the work of John Anderson Graham and its success in introducing education which led to the social mobility that facilitated in the eastern Himalayas. Charisma Lepcha (2017), on the other hand, interrogates how encounters with Christianity gave rise to new cultural identities among the Lepchas, which emerged as a complex interplay between Lepcha legends, biblical beliefs, Nepali narratives, and modern scientific worldviews. The dominance of Christian ideas among the Lepchas also led to a sense of "cultural loss". This process led to struggle among the Lepchas to find their balance between ethnic and religious identities.

This chapter study Ukhul as the "contact zone". While the works of Markus Viehbeck (2017); Sharma, (2017) and Jones, (2005) are taken into account, in this study, I will be using contact zone as the space of interaction or encounters between the Tangkhuls separated by different geographical spaces and border demarcations. This chapter will also focus on the role of American Baptist Christian mission association engagement in expanding the religious geography which enabled the formation of common identity across the borderland. It is also an attempt to explore the entanglement between cultures, Christianity, school, education and religious meetings which are crucial in reproducing identity consciousness in the contemporary Tangkhul society. It will also look into the everyday forms of mobility such as trade,

social, cultural and religious event that shaped the cultural connectedness across the transnational boundary.

This chapter broadly examines the significant role of Christianity and religious networks in the making of a common ethnic identity among the Tangkhuls. It also aims to study the paradoxical nature of India and Burma boundaries through the Tangkhul community and how the hard line that is reflected visually on the map or presented by the state is different in reality. In this case, the community and missionaries often cross the border whenever it is necessary as well as carrying out the various initiatives. It also aims to study the role of mission network or association in the enactment, culture reinforcement and in the process of reconnecting the community across the border.

As I have discussed in the first chapter, Ukhrul had become the mission station for the American Baptist missionary when the first Christian missionary Revd. William Pettigrew arrived in the Naga hills of Manipur. Subsequently, it was marked out first as a sub-division in 1919, during the British Raj and later upgraded to a full-fledged district, in November 1969 by the Government of India (Shinglai, 2015:37-38). Ukhrul became the administrative centre for the colonial administration as well as the hub for education, also centre for medical health and trade. As a result, Ukhrul became the district headquarter and the centre for all the religious associations, government administration, civil organisation and trade. As such, an important aspect which this chapter also have to explore into.

Crossing Boundaries, Connecting Communities

This section broadly discusses the complex nature of the India and Burma borderland by discussing the range of people who cross the border and the ways in which the state regulates the movement of people, goods in the border areas. The India and Burma border consists of long hilly terrain forest with fluid and porous border. This boundary separates more than 300 Tangkhul Naga villages in India and 33 in Burma (Vashum *et al.*, 2014:12). The border pillars which marks the international boundaries are generally missing, while a large part of the border remains forested area. As mentioned by Harish Chondola (2013:91), “Administering the Nagas in India and Burma became difficult for both the Burma and India state because the new element

of nationalism had taken roots in the people's mind post independent period beside people neither acquainted with the international border nor recognize it". This makes it even more difficult for the state to manage the porous border. Thus, crossing the boundary especially in the Ukhrul and Kamjong district is of less hassle for the borderland community compared to the other parts of the border in Manipur. For instance, while travelling between the two Tangkhul villages, Somra Khullen (the first Tangkhul Naga village in Burma) and Tusom Christian village (the last Tangkhul village in India) it is hard to convey where India ends and Burma begins. As a marker of instruction, one will only notice the small green board on the roadside. On the right side of the board carries Burman inscription written in blue, whereas on the left, instructions such as 'horn', 'right' and 'drive' are written in English. Jim Wungramyao Kasom also mentions in his short stories that "the only way one could differentiate India from Burma is through creepers. In India, the creepers creep from the right whereas in Burma they do that from the left" (Kasom 2018:54). However, this border become the site of intense state regulation when there is political turmoil in the state during elections or mass political upheaval in the region. Thus, during this period there is constant raid, curfew, regulator checkpoint and tightening of control in other spheres of daily life. These moments indicate the growing state power and presence along the border area. For instance, the clashes between Rohingya's and Myanmar's forces in 2017 in Burma compelled the Manipur government to open up police outpost at Tusom village in Ukhrul district⁷. This move was to regulate the influx of Rohingya refugees into Manipur. During this period, strict surveillance and regulation were enforced in the region where previously there was no such prior existence of police check post. Police deployed in the borders started checking documents of the people entering from Burma. The local trader from Somra Tract who regularly entered Tusom in the past for trade without any documents were now restricted from crossing the border. This instance shows how the Tangkhuls as a borderland community negotiate the absence and the presence of the state in everyday life.

⁷ <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/manipur-opens-border-outpost-178315>

Stories of missing hunters or people murdered in the wildwood,⁸ narratives of border crosser detained in Burmese jail, rumours of Burma armed junta's brutality, robbers, Indian border security forces, Assam Riffle and rebellion lurking in the border area etc., adds to a sense of danger and fear for the people living across the borderland. The villagers in the border area call the region "forgotten land" as development is inaccessible to these people⁹. The absence of proper physical infrastructures such as transport and communication facilities, electricity, irrigation and banking facilities adds complications in everyday life in the border region. The existence of poor social infrastructures like medical and health care facilities and education infrastructure have remained the key constraint for the socio-economic development of the region. The medical professionals, teacher etc., posted in the hills do not like to serve in the remote areas¹⁰. Government officials and staffs are often unable to travel in the region as there is no proper motorable road connectivity, even as the existing road becomes inaccessible during monsoon season due to the heavy rain. For instance, the border roads in the *Raphei* region and *kasom* block connecting Burma have been deplorable in condition, with the roads being motorable only in dry season. The area remains cut off throughout monsoon as the region is highly vulnerable to landslides and soil erosion causing restrictions on free movement of people, goods and services for the entire period of monsoon. There are no medical facilities in the border area and the few that exist are not functional. Therefore, people living in the border areas have witnessed a large number of premature deaths pertaining to preventable diseases¹¹. For instance, villagers have to carry the sick and have to travel long distances, often on foot, to reach the hospital in Ukhrul. People are inaccessible to rations, developmental funds for roads or any assistance from the state government. Thus, people living in the border villages depend on each other for their survival.

Border crosser includes not only the borderlander but also trader, rebels, missionary, artist, politician, activist, hunter and sightseer etc. For instance, Tangkhul Naga

⁸http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/manipur/terrorist_outfits/unlf_tl.htm. Also see Kasom, J. W. (2018). *Home Coming and the other stories*. New Delhi, Promila and co.

⁹ Field work note Chingai block December 2017; UDCRMS field work note June 2015 Kasom block.

¹⁰ Baseline survey of minority concentrated districts report Ukhrul, study commissioned by the Ministry of Minority Affairs Government of India

¹¹http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinions.Politics_and_Governance.Border_area_of_Ukhrul_demands_govt_attention_By_Ringphami_Shimray; also see

<http://kanglaonline.com/2017/09/villages-in-the-remote-border-areas-remain-the-worst-of-all/>; also see Documentary Somra Tract mission project part-2 (15:48) produce by TNBC

cultural and literary meet celebrated in 2018, at *Phapoh* (new Somra) village Homalin Township, Burma organised by the Tangkhul Naga Cultural and literary committee which was attended by more than 200 Tangkhul delegates from India. The delegate included prominent Tangkhul pop singer Shimreingam, Grace Shatsang (Tangkhul *Shanao Long* President), Vareinam Gachui (General Secretary Tangkhul Naga *Long*) (figure 6)¹².

A



B



Figure 6: Picture (A) shows Tangkhul Shanao Long president and (B) Missionary Ninglum Wungkhai along with other delegates at Tangkhul Naga cultural and literary meet celebrated in 2018, at *Phapoh* (new Somra) village Homalin Township, Burma. (Source: Ninglum wungkhai)

¹² Reported by Gachui Rinmi in informal conversation, 2018.

Villagers who are able to navigate the forested hilly terrain or who have the ability to negotiate with the border guards serve as guides for illegal border crossing. This often involves hefty fee when the situation is tense in the border. Other locals ‘smuggle’ goods across the border such as timber, gold, water buffaloes etc., from Burma. Forest products such as Ginseng, orchids, *Shem* and other wild plant are smuggled to China via Myanmar through the porous international border in Ukhrul and Kamjong district for the purpose of manufacturing medicines¹³.

The villages across the border areas are interdependent to each other due to the distance from their core. Cross-border local trade has existed between the Tangkhuls in India and Burma. The existence of *Somsai* and *Somra leingapha* (a seasonal trade fair) in the past is well preserved in the collective memories of the Tangkhul Nagas. It was a place where people from different villages and diverse walks of life thronged into the fair to barter the best products of their villages such as Salt, iron, shawl, cane and bamboo product etc. (Brown, 2001:43). In these trade fairs, various competitions took place, such as—*Khangtuk*, *Sao Khangatak*, *Kazei Kaphar* etc. Today, *leingapha* is no longer practiced, yet local trade between villages across the border is still prevalent. Timber, pigs, water buffaloes and baskets made of cane are most sought after by the people in India. The local trade is prominently engaged by the women. However, everyday life of the border villages or the existence of traditional local trade for the community is on other hand, ‘illegal’ for the state in the contemporary times. Hence, the binary between ‘legal and illegal’ trade is often divergent between the people living in the border and state. For instance, the Forest and Environment Minister of Manipur, Shri. Shyamkumar Singh recently confiscated timbers during his visit to Sorathen village in 24th March, 2018. He asserted that timber business is illegal. However, he was banned from entering Tangkhul-inhabited areas until the release of confiscated timber by the Tangkhul frontal bodies who argued that forest act should not be enforced in the tribal areas¹⁴. Thus, there is a constant contestation and negotiation between the borderland

¹³ <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=1..241013.oct13>. The Sangai express.

¹⁴ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/manipur-frontal-outfits-ban-forest-minister-shyamkumar-from-entering-tangkhul-area-5134962/>

Also see <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/illegal-logs-worth-rs-1-cr-seized-kamjong-dist/>

communities and state. Therefore, this complex nature of cross border trade relation raised a question such as where do legitimate exchange ends and smuggling begin? What quantities and categories of goods it is reasonable to carry? This question remains an important aspect in the study of cross-border trade relation.

Crossing the border is also an aspiration for the people living across the border because the currency in India is higher. This made the traders from Burma possible to earn more when they exchange into *kyat*¹⁵. On the other hand, the border inhabitant from India can invest in the goods imported from Burma. Therefore, people living across the border ignore the border whenever it suits them. Michael Baud and Willem Van Schendel opined that “though border is clearly drawn on the maps, many custom official is appointed or watch tower is builds, people ignore whenever it suits them...people also take advantages of the borders in the way that is not intended or anticipated by the creators” (Baud & Schendel 1997:211). In the context of Africa border, Griffiths *et al.*, (1996) show that there are few border post across Africa, besides, the expansion of the state bureaucracy has not necessarily resulted in the more effective administration. Lee Cassanelli (2010) looks into the cross-border alliances and financial networks along the Kenyan–Somali border that has been the basis for the economic transaction in the greater region. At times aiding the state and at times evading the coercive measures of the state, the frontier economy has remained a vibrant and robust trading network that persists even after the collapse of Somalia’s central government. In the same line, Peter Wekesa (2010) illustrates how the *Babukusu* and *Bagisu* communities along the Kenya–Uganda border have managed to continue their role as economic dealers despite attempts by both the states to prohibit such interactions. Therefore, borders are not so much constraining as enabling and can provide an array of social, political and economic opportunities that borderland communities exploit for their own benefit whenever it suits them.

The India and Burma boundaries cut across the cultural space. The villages across the border area are interdependent on each other as they are disconnected from the core due to the lack of road connectivity. As Asiwaju (1993) argues, the colonial boundaries often segmented pre-existing political unit and more generally bisected or

¹⁵ Kyat is the currency of Burma.

dissected cultural areas. Therefore, colonial boundaries harboured the potential for grievances because communities might be severed from each other and from their land. Visits to relatives across the India and Burma border are common and ‘normal’ occurrences without the need for documents. Kinship relation forms the most enduring basis of continuing cross border interaction that has resiliently persisted. People cross border and stay over during festivals, marriages, religious and cultural meetings etc. For instance, *He Khreng Bou Twei* (seed-sowing festival) is celebrated in Tangkhul villages in Burma every year and is marked by traditional music, feasting, traditional sports and traditional fashion show etc.,¹⁶. On another occasion, The Tangkhul Naga *long* (TNL) President along with the representative of Tangkhul Katamnao *long*, Tangkhul Shanao *long* visited Somra and attended silver jubilee celebration.¹⁷ The event was marked by a vibrant display of live musical concert participated by all the surrounding villages of Somra. Tangkhul folk song and folk dance was performed by the Tangkhuls in Burma during the celebration. The first Tangkhul Naga cultural festival cum exchange programme was held in 2018 at new Somra village which is one of such events organised as a continuous effort to revive the fraternal relation of Tangkhul in India and Burma (**figure 7**). People from different walks of life crossed the border to celebrate the festival¹⁸. The artist from Ukhrul performed Tangkhul pop songs. Therefore, there is the notion of common identity among the Tangkhul living across the border and there is hope for the people to form a common nation-state as the people are constantly struggling in the macro-politics of territoriality and state formation. Thus, while the border separates Tangkhuls in India and Burma, crossing the border becomes an important element in connecting people and community between India and Burma. The next section specifically discusses the role of Christian mission networks in connecting people and building identity consciousness among the Tangkhuls.

¹⁶ Fieldwork note November, Somra Khullen Village, 2017

¹⁷ The Sangai Express by Mungchan Zimik Ukhrul, 02 January 2014.

¹⁸ Narrated by Shangrei during informal conversation December 2018.

A



B



Figure 7: (A) Dance troupe performing at cultural and literary meet celebrated in 2018, at *Phapoh* (new Somra) village Homalin Township, Burma. (B) Elders adorn with headgear and Tangkhul traditional attire during cultural and literary meet celebrated in 2018, at *Phapoh* (new Somra) village Homalin Township, Burma. (Source: Ninglum wungkhai)

Christian Mission Network across the Border

Christian networks provide a very important frame in which the transnational practices of Christianity takes place. Alison Gilchrist (2009) argues that community development plays an important role in helping people to make connections that are useful and empowering. It also addresses how the network enables and overcome or dismantle some of the obstacles that prevent people from communicating and co-operating with one another. Gilchrist also argues that networking is a necessary and effective method of boosting, bridging and linking social capital, thus enhancing community cohesion and citizen empowerment. Gilchrist also argues that a core, but often neglected ... function of community development work is to establish, facilitate and nurture the crucial, but more difficult, boundary-spanning ties that support collective action and empowerment (Gilchrist 2009:18-23). Manuel Castells (1996) argues that networks have become the basic units of modern society and always organized around projects, goals and values. Castells also argues that “network is not simply the technology that characterizes contemporary societies, but also cultural, economic and political aspects that when combined can create the network society. Influences such as religion, cultural upbringing, political organizations, and social status all shape the network society” (Castells, 1996:86). Drawing on this framework, we can locate how religious networks in the context of Tangkhul are spread across the network logic and intertwined with community identity.

In fact, people cross the border to attend various cultural and religious meeting. The religious meeting significantly enables in navigating religious space and also connecting the people across the border. For instance, the Pastor’s conference organised at the Phungyo Baptist Church Ukhrul (district headquarter) in 2012 was attended by 180 pastors, 121 church leaders including 19 delegates from Somra Tangkhul Baptist Churches under the theme “Servant Leader”¹⁹. The conference was participated by the representative from the apex church associations such as South Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (STNBA), East Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (ETNBA), North Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (NTNBA) and Somra Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (STNBA-Somra). Tangkhul Naga Baptist church (TNBC) Quadrennial mission conference held at Poi village in 2018 was

¹⁹ <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/10/renowned-missionaries-in-ukhrul/>

participated by more than 10000 delegates including from Burma²⁰. The representatives participated in the different rituals of the church services. For instance, the delegates from TNBA-Somra Mission served as ushers during the Sunday conference services while Khamlang Baptist Church and Nongman Baptist church performed the special song.

The Somra Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (STNBC) is affiliated with the apex body organisation of Tangkhul Naga Baptist Church (TNBC). TNBC sponsored the salaries of 20 STNBC church pastors and 8 mission workers. The association also raised funds for the construction of the mission centre office etc. In an interview with E. Shaiza he said : “*Athum hi Tangkhul naona ithum na kasak kapai mayangmi akha ngatei thui kapai lei, chi wui vang eina TNBC na projects kachung kha eina otsak rum laka ngachon dalei*” (Somra are Tangkhul and it is our responsibility to support and encourage them)²¹. He continued, TNBC works in collaboration with Somra in many mission projects, including education which is one of the most important project. Somra is one of the most advanced regions among the Naga tribe in Burma. Therefore, the aim of the association is to empower the Somra through education so that other Naga communities in Burma can be reached. The TNBC also translated the New Testament Bible in Somra dialect in the year 2000 and later the whole Bible was translated in 2009 as part of its mission project²².

The church and Christian Baptist network thus open up a pattern of the platform for remittance aid and health services on both sides of the border which is fostered by common faith and political consciousness. Churches also provide social and economic support by meeting emergency needs, providing a network of friends for emotional and physical well-being, attending to sick and families who need special prayers etc. For instance, a group of missionaries and NGO’s during an annual mission tour in Somra Tract distributed clothes, material for school²³ etc. In another incident, in

²⁰https://tangkhulonline.com/news/tnbc_wui_quadrennial_congress_poi_b_c_li_hakmahalak_eina_hao_phok_hairaimphal/2018-04-06-386

²¹ See In the interview with E. Shaiza TNBC Ukhrl by The Aja Daily reporter 2013. In Somra Tract mission Break through Documentary film produce by TNBC; Fieldwork note, TNBC centre Ukhrl, 2018.

²² In the interview with E. Shaiza TNBC Ukhrl by The Aja Daily reporter 2013. In Somra Tract mission Break through Documentary film produce by TNBC.

²³ Indo-Myanmar border Baptists mission Project report 2018.

response to the call from the Council of Naga Affairs (Burma) and Naga Students and Youth Federation, Burma, Tangkhuls from Manipur of Ukhrul district sent a team under the banner “Tangkhuls for Nagas in Burma” to the border villages where 44 people had died and more than 1500 infected due to the outbreak of measles. They handed relief materials including medicine, nutritional food, clothes to the Naga Cultural Committee Myanmar (Yuya Committee in Burmese) at the residence of the chairman of Lungvah village in the presence of the village leader²⁴. Thus, the social and political struggle in the post-independence epoch saw the emergence of religious space as the important site for planting group consciousness among the community. This had profound effects on local identity formation and national consciousness. While Christian mission networks provided humanitarian aid, relief assistance and imparted free education, these processes are not devoid of tension. In fact, there are instances of contestation between different Baptist association and NGOs in the expansion of mission geography. By taking this opportunity local people often change their affiliation based on the situation for their benefit. For instance, during a conversation with Yarsheng²⁵, he narrates an incident where some individual who is in contact with TBCA Somra mission project took the remittance issued for the pastor salaries and later changed their affiliation to TNBC for their personal vested interest.

Christian and Buddhist missionary networks is also in a continuous contestation in the expansion of religious geography in the Somra Tract. The strong position of the Burmese official national religion rendered proselytizing difficult in Burma. Most of the Burmese adhered to Theravada Buddhism, which also dominates the culture and the court ceremonies. In the Burmese culture monks play important roles in everyday affairs of life as it requires their participation in major rituals and ceremonies. Theravada Buddhism teaches that monasticism is essential for a meritorious life, therefore, a considerable percentage of the Burmese male population are monks (phongyi), who occupy a significant position in society. Therefore, though Theravada Buddhism was restricted to the Burmese and Shan population of the kingdom, the influence is widespread in other community (Tapp, 1989). Thus, while Buddhism is a major religious practice in Burma Tangkhul’s and its affiliation to the Christianity (as

²⁴ <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/tangkhul-team-reaches-myanmar-villages>; Also see <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/22212-naga-region-still-grappling-with-measles-outbreak.html>

²⁵ Yarsheng is in his late 40’s and the conversation happen during my field work, Ukhrul 2017.

largely practiced by the community in India) often led to the dialectic of contestation and negotiation. This also led to the amalgamation of the Christian moral values with that of Buddhist practices which have a great influence in the everyday life among the Tangkhul in Burma. However, the dynamics of change may affect the communities in different ways (Dingrin, 2009). In some cases, the cultural boundaries between Buddhists and Christianity may enhance while on the other hand, there is a flexibility in dealing with cultural difference. These practices encompass not only an array of religious practices but social, economic and political practices as well. In the same line, Erik de Maaker (2007) studies the transition of the Garos community abandoning Songsarek religious practices to embracing Christianity through the performance of a mortuary ritual. Maaker argues that the element of Songsarek practices strongly inspire the Christian funeral and affects its religious and social implications.

The Buddhists missionary by establishing temples in Christian villages, imparting free education and foods to the children in the monasteries, providing suitable jobs or access to the government offices to students who profess Buddhism often wrecked the Christian community in the Somra Tract. The children who attend the Buddhist monastery school often converted to Buddhism²⁶. Some educated Christian Tangkhuls who have social, cultural bonding and affiliation to Tangkhuls in India considered it as a threat to the community unity. Thus, Tangkhuls living at the edge of two countries are often caught up in the dialectic of two major religious practices i.e. Hindu in India and Buddhism in Burma. This dynamic process of social-religious relationship has created strong bonding and a sense of belonging among the Tangkhul which led to the formation of imagined Tangkhuls.

Christian Network and Education

The theme for the *He Khreng Bou Twei* (seed sowing festival) 2013 in Somra khullen village was “Education: the Light of the World”²⁷. Education is considered as one of the most important instrument to empower the society and act as a platform to unite the community across the border. As private education shifts from a privilege to the norm in the present day pedagogical discourse giving free education became

²⁶ Field work note in conversation with Ninglum Wungkhai IMBBM center Ukhrul January 2018.

²⁷This story is narrated by Ngalawon from Somra Khullen village, field work note Somra Khullen January, 2018.

important. Students from Somra who got an education across various border villages in Ukhrul district such as Lunghar, Longpi, Tusom villages etc., and Ukhrul town are broadly divided into two groups i) seasonal- the group of students who crosses the border seasonally to get education while they are not sponsored by any individual or mission network. ii) The group of students who underwent through the adoption process. In this case, they are sponsored by their foster family. According to Horam, many Somra youths from Burma studied in schools run by Tangkhuls in India besides, constant social and economic ties were maintained among them until 1955. However, when Naga Nationalist movement became more prominent post 1950s and the demand for separate Naga Nation state became more imperative there is a constant encounter and conflict between the NSCN-IM and Indian security forces. Thus, it became difficult for them to exchange frequent visits and contact (Horam, 1977). During this period the security forces became more intensified in the India and Burma border in order to regulate the Naga guerrillas who crossed the border as a passage to China. Consequently, since, 1973 there has been a lack of continuity between the Tangkhuls in India and Burma (*Ibid*). Therefore, education projects taken up by the Baptist Christian mission network in recent times is the collective effort between the Tangkhuls in India and Burma to reconnect the community.

The Christian associations' education project aims to provide free education to the poorer sections of the community. This initiative is also taken up by various Tangkhul associations and makes an effort to reach out to the community beyond the border²⁸. In the Tangkhul hills, distance to the town define the quality of the education. Therefore, getting free education in Ukhrul town itself is important. With the bottom-up approach, various Tangkhul associations aim is to empower the poor and downtrodden Christians who are unable to access modern education. Thus, through education project, they seek to impart free education to the Tangkhuls in Somra through schools run by Christian associations in Ukhrul. Most of the students are orphans or raised by single parents. The first batch of 15 students from Somra Tract area was brought by the TBCA mission association in 2000 to Ukhrul district and admitted to Alice Christian Higher Secondary School. Currently, there are ten (10)

²⁸ Field work Note, Ukhrul, 2017.

students in this school out of which four students are girls²⁹. In this case, the students underwent through the adoption process. Students from Somra Tract are also enrolled at Sirarakhong Baptist Church High School Ukhrul. There are five students in class X, two students in VIII and one student in VII³⁰. “The student is free to choose the field of studies i.e., secular or theology, our aim is to educate and empower the communities to change in the society. It is also our aim to reconnect the people by bridging the barrier between Tangkhul Naga’s in India and Burma through education” added M. Vasha³¹. According to K. Zimik, who serves as the mission secretary, TBCA established schools in Skipe village, one of the border village in India with the mission to empower border villages where existing government schools are non-functional³². Boarding schools were also established in the Tusom and Sira-Rakhong villages. Here, students were taught English, Tangkhul language and other vocational training during summer break. Through the Christian associations’ initiatives, Tangkhuls in India and Burma could have access to school and modern education.

As a part of the mission project, the Baptist Christian association opened a coaching centre in the Somra Tract³³. Conventionally, the establishment of the institution is often linked with recognition and authorization from the state. In other words, the establishment of institutions is intimately associated with formalization and legalization. In the same way, opening of school in Burma is strictly under the control of the government. Therefore, Global English Academy a coaching centre in Leishi Township and other Naga self-administration zone were established by the association in collaboration with the local NGOs and individual³⁴. English, computer skills, Tangkhul language and Nagamese are being taught in the coaching centre to bridge the language barrier within the Nagas in India and Burma. Classes are conducted in the morning and evening as the student goes to regular school during the day. Some of the coaching institutes are not based on the legal and formal structures. In other words, home tuition run by the individual does not necessarily undergo a legalisation

²⁹ Report Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (TBCA) Mission Day of Prayer 2017

³⁰ *Talla*, bi-monthly publication of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association, March –April 2015 Volume viii/3-4/15 p-5.

³¹ In conversation with M. Vasha. Field work note TBCA mission Centre, Ukhrul, 2017

³² In conversation with Revd. K. Zimik. Field work note TBCA mission Centre, Ukhrul, 2017.

³³ Field work note, January 2018, Ukhrul. the Tangkhul association in India do not directly (or directly) involves in the establishment of the coaching centre, as the Somra Baptist Association is affiliated to the Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association in India I used the term christian association.

³⁴ Field work note, N. Shatshang (IMBBM) Ukhrul January 2018.

process. This institution as a “non- state informal institution” as such function through the societal connection. The coaching centre opens daily with singing and prayer which is aimed to inculcate the Gospel among the students. Through this process, many students are not only acquainted with Christian discourse such as prayer, singing and mission but also strengthen their spiritual growth. The institution also provides membership in a community, social security and connections to modernity. The aspiration to learn English language and demand for basic computer knowledge in the globalised market become one of the most important factors to attend the coaching centre. Students passing out from this institution also have better accessibility to obtain free education as they have the basic knowledge of reading and writing in English.

The students from Somra Tract who come to study in Ukhrul, have Tangkhul name and surname. Many Somra Tangkhuls belong to the same clans with other Tangkhul villages in India. As such, it becomes difficult to distinguish whether they belong to India or Burma unless the student volunteer and identify themselves. The students are from Naga self-administered zone, thus it is more difficult for them to have access to Rangoon than Ukhrul. Interacting with students from Somra Tract, who are studying in Ukhrul suggests that the notion of being Tangkhul Naga is very strong within the Tangkhuls in Burma. In one of the conversations with a student, when I asked, are you from Somra? Without a pause, Ramreishang Horam smiled and responded, Somra Tangkhul Naga³⁵. This suggests that there is a strong sense of resistance and also the notion of common ethnic identity based on the common nation-state is vibrant. Missionary schools and church networks play a key role in forging the pan-Tangkhul national identity. This intersection of social- cultural and religious element shape the everyday life of the people which is fostered by historical and political aspiration. For instance, in 2006, the four Naga hill districts i.e., Chandel, Tamenglong, Senapati and Ukhrul schools of Manipur demanded affiliation to Nagaland Board of Secondary Education (NBSE) in lieu of the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BSEM) (*Kengoo, 2009; Singh, 2016*). Subsequently, BSEM textbooks were replaced with that of NBSE in the Naga Hills of Manipur. This policy was launched as part of the non-cooperation movement for implementation of *meitei*

³⁵ Field work note, Ukhrul Bible College January, 2018.

mayek (Manipuri script) in July 2006. Consequently, the first batch of students affiliated to NBSE appeared their High school leaving certificate (HSLC) exam in 2007. Such a move is very much related to the common Naga aspiration. Besides, this is also made possible by the social, cultural and economic affinity with the community. Therefore, such policy is primarily implemented in the schools run by the native or mission school willingly or unwillingly. Shangreiyo was among the first batch of the student from Somra Tract who appeared for the HSLC exam at Dimapur in 2007. According to Shangreiyo “despite the failure of the policy, it educates the student that they are Naga and they need to be united, we are part of the process of change”³⁶. This indicates that the notion of common ethnic identity or political consciousness among the students is deeply inculcated and nurtured by the nationalist movement bound by Christian spirituality. The importance of connections and relationships within communities and society as a whole indicate that peripheries too have cores.

The students who passed out from the mission school often became much sought after once they returned to the Somra Tract. Being acquainted with the mission network and their system and the fluency in Tangkhul and English gives students the advantage to secure job not only in private spheres in Ukhrul but also in the mission field. As in the earlier days, in order to go to Somra Tract, missionaries had to undergo training in Somra language. Therefore, schools and other educational institutions become an important space for missionisation, promoting and implementation of the language. Language is an important element in the identification of ethnic identity. However, the language barrier is one of the major hindrances which has created a communication gap among the Tangkhul’s in India and Burma. The necessity to have a common medium of language has been immensely felt for the unity and mutual understanding among the Tangkhul Nagas. “TBCA’s aspiration and the aim are to make use of Tangkhul Bible and hymn in all the Tangkhul inhabited area in the near future” added M. Vasha³⁷. In another case, an attempt to connect the border villages was through the introduction of Burmese language in the school curriculum. Tusom Christian village (Tusom CV), a border village in India, introduced Burmese language classes in their primary mission school

³⁶ Informal conversation with Shangreiyo, Nongrim hill Shillong, 13 November, 2017

³⁷ Field work note TBCA mission centre Ukhrul 2017.

in 2013 to enhance the social and cultural ties and exchange of ideas among the border villages³⁸. Student expository tours were also organised to educate and strengthen this relationship. For instance, students residing in the mission boarding school (including Student from Somra Tract) visited the Tanrui Baptist Church and Changta Baptist Church which is located in the western part of Ukhrul district as part of the excursion³⁹. During the visit, they preached the gospel and engaged in various activities in church services. This sharing of religious space and the preaching of gospel became a training ground for future church leaders. Today, religious affiliation in the Tangkhul Naga community is also closely associated with people's aspirations for education and economic development and vice versa. It is also deep-rooted in cultural cores composed of both modern and traditional element. These concerns are important factors in understanding why largely native Christian churches continue to play a major role in the direction of education, linguistics and social change.

Christianity and Nationalism Consciousness

One typical Sunday morning, Rammung⁴⁰, narrated the story of Mosses from the Bible (Exodus: 14) in the context of Tangkhul society⁴¹. He ended his sermon by making the weekly announcements. After reviewing the upcoming events, he asked his congregation for special prayer, especially for the Naga framework agreement signed between National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the Government of India (GOI). The congregation thus stood up and sang songs of praise led by the church choir. This was followed by mass prayer where all the congregation prayed in one voice as a sign of solidarity. In this way, locally-based institutions such as the church is important in connecting and facilitating people's spiritual and political consciousness. While society and polity of the community deeply influence the church, moral values and the Christian ethics influence the social and polity of the community. Therefore the binary between the two blur many a times.

Eilenberg (2011) opines that in post-independent period hilly borderlands delimiting the new nation-states became battlefronts of state-making and spaces of confrontation

³⁸ Informal conversation with C. Vashum, Munirka Tangkhul Church Delhi Prayer cell Wednesday worship, Delhi February 2018.

³⁹ Talla: Bi Monthly Publication. July-August 2015. Published by TBCA

⁴⁰ Somra Baptist Church Ukhrul, Ukhrul November, 2017.

⁴¹ Mosses liberated the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land.

between divergent political ideologies in the Indonesia and Malaysia borderland. The Indonesian state implemented the importance of religion, or more specifically, “the belief in one God” to assimilate the Iban communities into national ideology. Therefore, religious affiliation is often used as an important key factor to tame people into the loyal subject and assimilate them into nationalist ideology. Christianity in the Tangkhul society is not directly associated with the Naga nationalist movement. However, most of the nationalist leaders and members of the community are Christian and at the same time church members belong to the community and many church leaders preach and support the Naga movement through prayer. “Christianity is the key part of the rhetoric of contemporary pan-Naga identity which is seen as the unifying forces that have brought together Naga from the different group in an evangelistic mission” (Joshi, 2013). Thus, in the ‘well-connected’ society like Tangkhul community, Christianity and Tangkhul identity are intertwined and cannot be separated (**figure 8**). For instance, the church organises a special fasting prayer programme once in a year for the Naga nationalist movement in all the Tangkhul inhabited area. In this way, the Baptist church provides the spiritual and emotional support for the nationalist movement. Therefore, nationalism, Christianity and its institution are important in supporting an emerging sense of ethnic identity and are intimately intertwined and reinforce each other.

The significance of the theme of Bible and method of interpretation of the text in relation to the context of the people became an important instrument to reconnect the community in the larger Naga Nation state context. In other words, during the post-colonial times, the aspiration of the formation of the separate Naga nation-state emerged. Therefore, the theme of reunification and reconciliation remain the central theology in the context of social and political struggle.



Figure 8: Peace rally organised by TNL at Ukhrul, 2018.

The commitment to serve God and community are an important aspect in engaging in mission work, while in the process nurturing the notion of community consciousness. Contrary to the religious freedom practiced in India by the community, the issue of religion is much politicised in Burma as Christianity is regarded with suspicion in converting Buddhist by the Burmese state authorities. Therefore, many a times evangelisation across the border require taking the risk despite the support of the local people. As such, the missionary not only plays an important role in spreading the Gospel but also in shaping identity formation based on common nationhood. Conversion to Christianity means embracing a new identity, thus conversion entails inclusion to the community not only as a ‘Tangkhul Naga’ but also as a Tangkhul Naga Christian. For instance, the TNBC report on annual Somra mission tour on 10th August 2017 reported that “*TNBC na mission chihozang laka nathum hi Naga naona, Tangkhulnao na da hangkachithei mang maningla vare wui poa khamatha la tamchitheiya*” (TNBC mission was to educate the notion of oneness to the native people that they are Tangkhul Naga and also to teach and spread the good news of Jesus Christ). As Horstmann (2010) argues, politics of identity and religious affiliation for the stateless Karen in the Thailand and Burma borderland are interconnected and they are empowered through Christian networks. Imbibing

Christianity liberates and enable them to reclaim their self-being in the refugee camp. He also argues that Christian identity is intimately associated with Karen nationalism and intertwined with the projection of a Karen state. In the context of the Tangkhul, common religious belief and political ideology enable them to stretch far beyond the villages and connect them to the larger context which enables the people to imagine the pan-Tangkhul Naga identity. Therefore, Christian networks have played a significant role in modelling and supporting expressions of common identity.

Christianity: Connecting the Community through Religious Events

The urgency for the need to revitalize culture and reconnect the Tangkhul community became one of the most important agenda in organising religious gatherings yet centering on spiritual growth. As Swidler (1986) pointed out that culture is composed of the “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories and rituals of daily life”. These components constitute the cultural repertoire, of individuals and groups, and they are organized to create particular strategies of action. These religious meetings also become an important space for cultural enactment.

Today, in every biennial or triennial conference of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association, there is a schedule for the cultural programme. It is in such events where participants showcase their rich cultural heritage. TBCA triennial conference at Phalee village and TNBC quadrennial conference at Poi village in April 2018 also witnessed this trend of the revitalisation of culture in the religious gathering. The dying tradition of “*Otrei Kaphung*” or “*Lengvei kaphung*” (carrying harvested paddy) was demonstrated by the Phalee village youth at TBCA triennial gathering in the presence of religious leaders and delegates to showcase and mark the preservation of culture. Harvest of paddy in the Tangkhul Hills is usually carried out in great fanfare by exchange of labour among the youths or clan members working in turn. In another way, this traditional practice of carrying newly harvested paddy from the paddy fields to the village granary is an event to showcase their masculinity (Luikham, 2011:40-41). It is also an opportunity for the ‘strongest man’ to lay his claim on the most beautiful girl in the village. “*Lengvei kaphung*” is a competition segmented into two categories “*Ngahei Ot*,” which is a competition amongst the peer group while

“*Samwot Kaphung*” is an individual event. The paddy is packed in a cloth woven bag called *Pheingai* and *Shurkhom*. Each packed *otrei* contains 15-25 “*Luk*”⁴². The paddy is properly tied with a string called *Kashai* which is decorated with a rooster comb or Hornbill feather and marigold⁴³. Also, Soraphung, Chatric and Poi village’s youth showcased their cultural dance in the TNBC quadrennial mission conference at Poi village in April, 2018⁴⁴. This religious conference or gathering is a space where all the Tangkhul villages gather and as such becomes the space to showcase and reinforce the ‘dying’ culture of the community (**figure 9**).



Figure 9: Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association (TBCA) Triennial Conference choir conducting Hymn in 2018 at Phalee. (Chihan Tamang).

In order to reconnect the border villages, Tusom Student Union (TSU) organised a religious event (Palm Sunday) with that of cultural elements to strengthen the relationship among the Tangkhul Christian village and at the same time reinforcing the culture.⁴⁵ In this event, the border villages such as Somra Tangkhul and Tusom Christian village joined hands in fellowship to share the biblical message, which also included cultural programme or cultural services in the afternoon programme. The Tangkhul Somra villages from Somra Khullen, Phungtret and Leiyum, adorned in colourful traditional attires presented an array of cultural items like traditional dances

⁴² *Luk* is a bamboo basket usually used for measuring rice. It has the capacity of holding 16 kg of Rice.

⁴³ *Phalee village demonstrates dying tradition of Tangkhuls*. The Sangai express on April 10, 2018.

⁴⁴ Narrated by R. Shatsang in informal conversation, Ukhrul, 2018.

⁴⁵ *Somra ravels Ukhrul natives with Burmese culture*. The Aja Daily on April 14, 2016.

and songs, including that of ethnic tunes from Burma. The Tusom villagers also presented folk dances, performing arts, while the women performed a unique art of pounding rice grain which was tuned with a melodious folk song. The youths adorned in attractive headgears decked with rare hornbill feathers and beaded necklaces participated in folk dance (**figure 10**). The spiritual events provided the border villages an opportunity to connect and reconnect. It also reinforced the culture and conveyed to the members that Tangkhuls till date remained embraced in “one culture and faith”. These practices also stands in contrast with the changes that unfolded amongst the Tangkhul Christians, wherein during the first wave of Christianity, the old practices (song, musical instrument, dance, ornament, hairstyle, etc.) of the Tangkhuls were willingly or unwillingly discarded as it was considered to be polluted, ‘barbaric’ ‘primitive’ or practices of ‘heathen’ by the early Christian missionary (Ngakang, 2011)⁴⁶. Charles Chasie observe this phenomenon as “inability of some early missionaries to appreciate Naga beliefs and practices.....threatened to completely sever all vital link of people’s cultural and historical roots” (Venuh, 2004:132). In other words, certain form of de-culturalisation transpired to adopt Christianity.

Today, Christian mission network plays an important role in consolidating group unity, cultural reinforcement and in the process of reconnecting the community across the border. Hence, cultural capital and religion is the important factor in implementing national ideology and group consciousness. Christianity also plays an important role in reviving and preserving cultural identity through various cultural practices in the religious events. As such Christianity and Christian Tangkhul identity are closely intertwined and intersect in recasting common Tangkhul identity especially in contemporary times.

⁴⁶ Also see for Hair style Kachai Thikhor Baptist Church 93rd anniversary foundation Day 2010. Souvenir cum Shangyom Horam biography.



Figure 10: Tangkhul in Somra performing cultural dance during Somra Tangkhul and Tusom CV during the join fellowship. (Source: The Aja Daily).

Conclusion

This chapter have broadly examined the significant role of Christianity and the religious networks in the making of a common ethnic identity among the Tangkhul community. The mission networks or associations play an important role in the enactment, culture reinforcement and in the process of reconnecting the community across the border. In the next chapter, I will explore the nature of women participation in the religious structure while discussing the representation of ‘new’ women in the pursuit of an imagined community.

Chapter 3

Women in mission networks: Women emancipation, mobility and changing configuration in religious space

“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8)

Introduction

On a chilly winter day in December 2017 in Ukhrul, the incessant rain for two days brought its denizen relief from the dust that overtakes the street. I headed for the field work in the heart of Ukhrul, as I have an appointment with Mr. Yangrek, a student from Somra Tract. To get relief from the cold, I entered the famous *chai* store or tea hotel called *Kalu* Hotel. The tea hotel is run by Nepalese since the 1980s. It is said that the name of the hotel have changed after Mr. Kalu's dead, with the hotel being taken over by his relative. Yet people still call the chai hotel as *Kalu* Hotel. It is a place normally thronged by men, mostly discussing local, national and international politics, society, relationship, religion, and governmental schemes etc. It is also a space used for 'time-pass' by men, especially by retired servicemen. I sat quietly in the corner waiting for Mr. Yangrek. While waiting for the *chai*, an old man approached me and asked: "*table hi li mapampaira*" I responded: "*pamkhalai loh*". The old man introduced himself as Mr. Kahaosan. The conversation eventually continued earnestly. "*Thakha*" (So) he said "*inao ngalava nanava khisa?*" (What do you do, my daughter?) For a moment I remained silent and said, "I am doing M.Phil."... "*china va class kayakha?*" (What class is M.Phil ?). He said.... I explained to him that after completion of Master of Arts (M.A) one have to pursue M.Phil to carry out research. I continued, I am working on the mission network working across the India and Burma border and the role of religion in the formation of a common identity amongst the Tangkhuls. Mr. Kahaosan and the man sitting next to him looked excited and wanted to know more about Somra. We continued to discuss the religious affairs in the Tangkhul hills and the upcoming mission conference to be held at Poi and Phalee village on April, 2018. Mr. Kahaosan happened to be from Poi village and invited me to attend the mission conference. He narrated a story about Mrs. Ningmayung, the former women society accountant-cum-treasurer who managed the accounts and records. He said, she is illiterate but actively engaged in church activities and never makes mistakes in her accounting. He also laughed and said

“shinao he kathem va themphalunga ara amingla kapithei kala records la society kachungkha wui sing dalei” (now she can write her name and managing multiple files belonging to different societies)⁴⁷. This discussion in a way opens up to an important aspect in the larger discourse of feminist debate on women participation in religious space. How do women inhabit the religious structure? Do such space offer them agency?

In the second chapter, I examined the role of mission networks in the formation of common identity across the India and Burma border. In this chapter, I will attempt to study the role of women mission networks in the expansion of religious geography and their role in the formation of common identity. This chapter will also examine the role of women mission networks in emancipating women while interrogating the nature of women participation in the religious sphere. The existing feminist debate on women’s participation in religious affairs is often seen as asserting their presence in a male dominant space while, on the other hand, the nature they use to enter these religious spheres are grounded in discourses that is of subordination to male authority. Thus, how do we understand the dialectic of women participation in the structure of religious affairs or mission networks? How do we understand this dichotomy of the representation and their ability to act within constricted institutional space and at the same time, the limits of independent female missionary agency? In this chapter, I argue that despite the multiple imbalances of power, women makes space in the religious sphere and flourish. These phenomena produce the new form of social ability and new ways of expressing women’s interest within the structure in many aspects of social life.

In a recent study, Sabah Mahmood (2011) examines the complexities of Muslim women and their participation in mosque movement in Egypt. In her study, she looks at autonomy as important elements of individualism and subversion to status quo. Mahmood identifies how women struggle and survive ‘within a system of inequality’ and ‘flourish despite its constraints.’ She focuses not only on women subversion but on “what resources and capacities do a pious lifestyle make available”. Hyaeweol Choi (2010) argues that the majority of ‘educated’ ‘new’ women in Korea in 20th

⁴⁷ Field work note Ukhrul December 2017.

century had been exposed, directly or indirectly, exposed to Christian mission schools and churches. She suggests the extensive influence Christianity had in shaping modern Korean womanhood. By using post-colonial and feminist perspectives, she studies the power of missionary discourse and the politics of gender that shaped a certain kind of new and modern womanhood within the particular historical circumstances of early modern Korea and gender dynamics in the Korean mission field within the context of Korea's pursuit of modern nationhood. Women in the Tangkhul community has made massive contributions, not only in the area of religion but also in social and cultural changes in the society. The Tangkhul community's encounter with Christianity not only enabled in developing a common identity consciousness but also new ways in representing women within the structure in the pursuit of an 'imagined community'. Therefore, by situating the context of the Tangkhul community within the larger discourse of the existing body of work I argue that autonomy is subjective.

Christian Women Mission Networks

This section broadly discusses the formation of women mission network in the Tangkhul Hills by discussing how wives of western Christian missionaries initially played an important role in laying the foundation of Tangkhul Baptist women society. During the 19th century, the work of missionaries was understood to be “the preaching of the Gospel, the translation and publication of the Holy Scriptures, and the establishment of schools” (Midgley, 2006:335). Therefore, women were excluded from preaching by all the mainstream British Protestant sects and was expected to undertake only into education or medical work etc., as an accomplice to their husband. The exclusion of women from mission work was that – “only men could be achieved the formal qualifications of a full missionary; become the salaried employees of foreign missionary societies and perform the primary component of a missionary's role of preaching”⁴⁸. However, men were expected to get married before they depart for the mission work so that a couple could exemplify the proper Christian family and raise future missionaries. A wife was viewed as a hedge against sexual temptation, and in addition, she had greater access to native women and children (Taylor, 1979). Therefore, though women's role in mission work were recognised,

⁴⁸ *Ibid* P-229

women participated in the mission field only as wives and was seen as fulfilling women's natural role (Hill, 2007). However, although women were the passive participant in the mission work in the western mission movement, the conceptual framework of 'white women's burden' to bring civilized femininity to their 'other' sister is widely observable, while missionaries aimed to civilize the 'heathen' or evangelize the 'Savage'. This 'burden' was most often articulated as a 'mission of sisterhood' to emancipate 'other' women in the context of western femininity and womanhood. Therefore, when western missionaries arrived in the Tangkhul Hills, the women arrived as the wife rather than a missionary and actively engaged in women's education and medical work.

The first Women's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (WBFMS) was formed in 1871 and in between 1871 to 1912 the mission send 22 women missionaries across Northeast India⁴⁹. Later, in 1913 Women's American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (WABFMS) was formed⁵⁰. The American Baptist missionaries' wife such as Alice Graham and Helen Supplee left their hallmark in the women emancipation through modern education, medical work, artistic work and conversion of women. They also provided an important domestic base for their husbands and modelling proper feminine domesticity to indigenous women (Solo & Mahangthei, 2006). The influence of the wave of the feminist movement is widely observed in the work of the early women Christian missionary that arrived in Northeast India especially in the Tangkhul Hills. The writings of the feminist such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), Harriet Taylor Mill (1851) and Emma Goldman (1906) advocated for the emancipation of women and through education bring suffrages to women. The idea of gender solidarity which is built upon an assumption of sameness that is supported by the idea that there exists a common oppression of patriarchy around which women must come together is a common theme uniting women around the globe. However, the common ground for women emancipation and common sisterhood among the mission women in the Tangkhul Hills is based on education and Christianity rather than against the patriarchy.

⁴⁹ TBCA Women History (2018). Published by TBCA church women union. Also see Aphuno Chase Roy (2013) American Baptist Missionary in North East India 1836-1950. Guwahati, p-55.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p-2

Alice Goreham and Helen Supplee which were wives of American missionaries, cultivated the notion of the importance of forming Baptist women society as an independent women organisation within the patriarchal structure of the church where women can fully participate and utilize their rights. The move for the formation of women society was initiated by the early educated women who got the education in the Pettigrew's mission school along with Goreham. In 1946, during the North East Baptist Association Manipur (NEBAM) meeting held in *Hallang Masorim* Baptist Church, Hellen Supplee⁵¹ in her sermon encouraged the participants for the need to form the apex Baptist women organisation for all the Christian Tangkhul women⁵². Subsequently, ninety women participants in the meeting were motivated by her message and made a collective decision to form the apex Baptist women society. Thus, the project to create an association took shape amongst the women. An amount of Rupees 9.4/- collected in the offering during the meeting held in *Hallang* village became the seed fund for the women society⁵³. Subsequently, in March 10, 1946, they organised the first Baptist women conference in Phungyo Baptist Church⁵⁴. As a result, 135 delegates attended the meeting as the representatives of different local Churches from Tangkhul Hills simultaneously formed the NEBAM women society⁵⁵. NEBAM women society thus became the apex body association of all the Tangkhul Baptist women society in the Tangkhul Hills. Later, the newly elected executive of the NEBAM women society encouraged its members to form women society by visiting churches in the Tangkhul Hills. The membership of the NEBAM women society was divided into two criteria i.e., rupees 60 and 30 respectively based on the membership of the church. One of the most important objectives of NEBAM women society was the upliftment of women through modern education⁵⁶.

The women society held church service every Friday which was also called Friday meeting in the local church⁵⁷. They also conducted Bible study based on the women oriented perspective. This space gave the women a platform to stand in the public

⁵¹ Hellen Supplee is the wife of missionary George Supplee of Lumberton.

⁵² *Tangkhul Baptist Christian Association Women Society History (2018) p-10*

⁵³ *Ibid*:p-10

⁵⁴ *Tangkhul Baptist Christian Association Women Society History (2018) pp-10-11*

⁵⁵ *Ibid* p-10, Also see Phungyo Baptist Church Women Society thotchan (history) 1910-2010, Ukhrol (2010) pp 6-7.

⁵⁶ *Tangkhul Baptist Christian Association Women Society History (2015) p-11*

⁵⁷ Mashitmi ex-women chairman Lunghar Haopam Baptist Church. Field work note December (2017)

sphere and encourage each other. The women took initiatives in different activities of the Friday church service and administration. Therefore, such a platform enabled the women to engage in everyday ways of life at the same time shaping and moulding the spiritual growth.

The NEBAM women society periodically organised leadership training for women. For instance, On August 27-28, 1958, the first leadership training for women was organised by NEBAM women society at *Seikhor* Baptist Church under the theme “Thy kingdom come” Matthew 6:10. The topic for the leadership training were i) The women organisation ii) The women activities iii) The Christian wife responsibilities iv) The function of family life v) The role of women in the Baptist field and vi) Modern domestic life.⁵⁸ The leadership training taught the role and responsibility of the women in the Christian family, church and society. Though the topic of the women leadership training was based on the role of women as ‘nature and nurturer’ interlaced around domesticity, it liberated the womenfolk. Through such training, women were more aware of the leadership responsibility. Such religious gatherings also provided a space to share their stories of hardship and testimonies. The women who previously never ventured out of the village were able to travel and meet diverse groups of women. Therefore, it became a space where women encouraged and supported each other based on common sisterhood. The life of educated women like Ningmasai, Ningmi Jajo etc., and their sermons inspired young women who participated in the leadership trainings and encouraged them to receive modern education⁵⁹.

The existing NEBAM women society subsequently changed their name to Tangkhul Naga Baptist Convention (TNBC) women society on 29th January 1959, during the conference held in Lungpha Baptist Church⁶⁰. Changing the name of the society also indicates the shift in nature of the Naga society and political affiliation at the particular juncture of time. In order to respond to the changing structure of the society and the increase in membership, the TNBC women society employed full-time

⁵⁸ Secretarial report OF 6th NEBAM Women Society, conference held at Seikhor Baptist Church on 27th to 28 august 1958; also see *TBCA women society Thotchan (2018) pp-12-13*.

⁵⁹ This story is narrated by Paishola 74 years old, Ukhrul.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*:p-13

women workers known as women promoters⁶¹. Consequently, with the appointment of women promoters, from 1961 onwards every woman member of the village churches affiliated to TNBC paid rupees 50/- as the membership fee to the TNBC women society. Subsequently, each and every Baptist church association centre appointed women promoters and increased their membership fees by rupee 1/-. With the money, they managed to pay the salary of five women promoters, sponsored scholarship for four women students studying in the TNBC Bible School, gave prizes to meritorious student award for women and other mission projects⁶². By 1965, 9316 women members were registered in the women society⁶³. The role of the women promoter was to visit the local church and engage in common fellowship, give moral support, as well as teach record and file maintenance.

In 1958, TNBC women society made an economic plan with the initiative of Ms. Ningmasai, Ms. Ningmi Jajo, and Ms. L.K. Mariam along with the association promoter. The objective of the economic plan was to produce and promote traditional Tangkhul *Kashan Kachon* (shawl) as weaving was predominantly engaged by the women. Tangkhul Baptist Christian Association selected two women each from the mission center who were actively engaged and had excellent skills in weaving by paying rupee 8 only⁶⁴. With the advice of Alice Pettigrew, the women also kept aside a handful of rice to raise fund for the women society mission (Khayi, 1996:34). This practice of leaving aside a handful of rice is still prevalent among the womenfolk in women services or Sundays in Manipur and other metropolitan cities, which are then auctioned to support mission fund. Thus, the formation of women society gave the platform for connecting women in the Tangkhul community through space where women dominate. Such a move to produce and promote the traditional *Kashan Kachon* also emerged with the notion to assert the identity and rewrite the unique history through weaving. Women mission networks thus engaged in supporting women through the mission conference, leadership and skills training (**figure 11&12**). They also provided employment opportunities as well as knowledge of accounting,

⁶¹ The TNBC women society meeting held at Raotei Baptist Church on August, 1960. also see TBCA women society Thotchan (2018) p-13

⁶² The TNBC women society meeting at Hangkaw Baptist church on 4th march, 1961. Also see TBCA women society thotchan (2018) p-13.

⁶³ *TBCA women society thotchan (2018) p-14.*

⁶⁴ The TNBC/WEC/1967:10-11. The 29th TNBC/WEC/Meeting at *Sikiphung* Baptist Church on 31 August to 3rd September 1967.

record maintenance and promoted women oriented skills to sustain themselves. The knowledge that they imbibed through their engagement in the mission work were utilized in their everyday ways of life.



Figure 11: TBCA women Executive committee (2018) (Source: Chihan Tamang).



Figure12: TBCA women Leadership Training 2017, at Lunghar Baptist church. (Source: Chihan Tamang)

The Role of Women Mission Network

The Tangkhul Christian society, especially the church have generally been an exclusively male domain where they congregate, socialize and command all the relevant roles such as pastor, deacon, missionaries, public religious practitioner etc.,⁶⁵. This division of the labour along gender line in the church reflect the patriarchal realities found in the structure of the existing society. “Colonial and patriarchal denominational polity reinforced by indigenous biases and taboo against women has consigned the Asian women second class member in the faith community” (Pui-lan, 2000:98). “Women’s subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life” (Mahmood, 1998:25). However, in this religious space, women not only struggle with the inequality but also often flourished despite the constraints. Through negotiation and resistance, they create their space within the religious structure. They play an important role in expanding the Christian mission in the Tangkhul community and spreading the gospel. Education, church ministry, evangelism and discipleship constitute the most commonly reported area of women participation in the religious structure⁶⁶. Majority of the women missionaries worked in some kind of educational ministry, including formal and non-formal teaching roles, orphanage ministries and boarding school mission. While many of the missionaries are involved in local church ministries, such as leading worship, teaching in Sunday school, and also serving as women promoter, a few others are engaged in evangelism, discipleship ministries, church planting, and counselling. Thus, the process and the structure inherited from the western missionaries is still practiced in many fields despite the changes and indigenisation of Christianity. In other words, that the remnants of the western mission still exist in the practices of Tangkhul in today’s evangelising method.

The Baptist women society is engaged in various mission projects to emancipate women socially, economically and spiritually. One of the most important projects run by the Tangkhul Baptist women society is Alice Christian Higher Secondary school in Ukhrul town and Worin Christian High School in *Ngaphar* supported by TBCA and

⁶⁵ For similar argument in global south see Ma, J. (2014). The Role of Christian Women in the Global South. *Transformation*, 31(3), pp-194-206.

⁶⁶ This is my observation based on the field work.

NTNBA women society respectively⁶⁷. These institutions provide free education to meritorious students and also to students from across the border as mentioned in Chapter 2. The aim of the mission school projects places emphasis on the unity and common platform where women in the mission can come together in the expansion of religious geography and the welfare of the Tangkhul community⁶⁸. The Baptist women society as such worked tremendously for the upliftment of women's education. They began by giving the scholarship of rupees 100 only to four women from each circle association for two years in the Bible College established by the missionary Dr. E.E Brock at Ukhrul in 1952. Today, this practice of giving scholarship and free education is still prevalent. When the students complete their course, they return to their circle and worked for the upliftment of women society⁶⁹. The women society is also engaged in various other mission projects such as the Somra Tract mission Project and *Leimathong Tampak* (valley) mission project, TNBC *Maring* mission project, Nepal mission, Churachandpur women society and MBC church building etc.,⁷⁰. Thus, through their engagement in various mission projects they tremendously facilitate and contribute to the expansion of religious geography.

The Baptist women mission project also included *shanao wui pangthem* (women artistry) which is actively engaged in the production and preservation of traditional costume and attire⁷¹. The project can be traced back to the 1948 Baptist Golden Jubilee of Manipur held in Ukhrul, when the NEBAM women executive made a collective decision to check and regulate the existing *Kashan* and *Kachon* with the aim to produce finer quality and preserve this traditional knowledge. Thus, the women society selected 10 women to begin the project. As a result, during the mission conference held at Shangshak village, a weaving competition was organised by NEBAM women society for the first time⁷². The competition prize of rupees 135/- was borne by Mrs. Ayaphi.⁷³ While many scholars assert that the Christian missionaries in the Northeast India region are responsible for the loss of indigenous

⁶⁷ Alice Christian higher secondary school annual prayer report 2016; NTNBA Worin Christian High School annual prayers Sunday report 2017.

⁶⁸ Secretarial report The 61st TNBC women executive meeting at Phungyo Baptist Churches on 7th December 1979.

⁶⁹ TBCA women society thotchan (2018). Published by TBCA women society. Pp-20-21

⁷⁰ Ibid.p-21

⁷¹ TBCA women society thotchan (2018). Published by TBCA women society, P-21.

⁷² TNBC women society thotchan 1946-1982 (1983).Published by TNBC women society, p25-26.

⁷³ Ibid p-20

material culture we can say that in the case of the Tangkhul, missionary's wife like Alice Graham helped cultivate the notion and importance of preserving and promoting weaving.

A



B



Figure 13: Picture A and B show the process of weaving Rose *Kashan* and Luingamla *Kashan* respectively at CeWE Centre Ukhrul. (Source: Chihan Tamang)

Through the women mission networks, women from different Tangkhul villages come together and work for the upliftment of the society. Under this aim, the Baptist women society also initiated the project to uplift the womenfolk by forming the Centre for Women Empowerment (CeWE). The objective of the centre is to provide weaving, tailoring, handloom and food processing training for income generation for the women and support the family (**figure 13**)⁷⁴. The centre provides training to the women in various field which includes, making pickles (chilly, garlic, mango, mix vegetable, beef pickle, meatball, brinjal etc.) soap, doughnuts, cornflakes, plain cake, banana cakes, chocolates cakes, cake icing, *Hajmola*, *khangkhuithei Hajan*, ginger candy, flower making, Christmas card, candlestick modification, traditional bracelet, necklace and earring etc. Periodically, the centre also provides training to the women from each circle association. Training begins with the morning devotion programme led by the TBCA mission staff. The aim of the project is to empower the women through financial independence by using existing and available resources. Recently, the project also established the vocational training center for both men and women (2008), weaving center (2008) and transitional home (2010)⁷⁵. The Tangkhul women society also engages in various training activities in collaboration with NGOs like Priscila Centre Guwahati, UNPT, UNMM, Action of Women in Development (AWID), and Participatory Action for Sustainable Development (PASDO) etc⁷⁶. In this way, women Christian mission network creates a platform to co-sponsor a workshop to bring together representatives of governments and voluntary agencies who are active in the various training program for women in self-employment or co-operative employment in marketing and service. The women society also opened a stationary cum canteen in 2014 within the Alice Christian Higher secondary school campus with the aim to provide employment opportunities to women and generate income for CeWE mission project. The women societies are engaged in various other activities such as spiritual growth through Bible study, camp, seminar, workshop, etc., giving assistance to the HIV/AIDS positives widow and children, as well as giving training to the school dropout women (tailoring, weaving, food processing etc.)⁷⁷ (**Figure 14**). Mrs. Yangmila from Somra Tract is one of the beneficiaries who

⁷⁴ *Talla* July –August 2013. Bi-monthly publication of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association. p12.

⁷⁵ It give shelter to the women who doesn't not have the place to stay.

⁷⁶ TBCA women society thotchan (2018). Published by TBCA women society. P-25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* pp-20-25.

underwent weaving training under women society CeWE Project. She owns two weaving machines which they called *Koll*. The *Kachon* that she weaves is bought by the SHG in bulk to create waist coat, bags, and necktie etc.⁷⁸. Mrs. Mingthingla is a mother of four who received training from CeWE in candy making. She also received training at Guwahati for food processing training under Ukhrul District Women Institute of Micro-Credit (UDWIM). She used the abundantly available seasonal wild fruits and plum available in her village. The candy making helps her earn income which she spends for the daily expense. The work also enable her to look after her children, and at the same time engage in income generation. Recently, her business expanded to the making of ginger, tamarind candy, *fasongthei* (olive) and pickle of different varieties⁷⁹. In a conversation with Mrs. Shimreichon, she asserts that self-reliance and sustainability are important values as Tangkhul women do not have the right to inherit the ancestral property nor the husband's property after the husband's demise. Therefore, many women suffer in the socio religious setting, especially HIV/AIDS positive widows. They are more vulnerable as they are stereotyped and as a result, to sustain themselves, the women society are not only engaged in giving them training but also provides the transitional home.⁸⁰ These examples indicate how the Baptist women society is responding to the need of the changing society and especially uplifting women by providing various vocational skill training. It also makes more effective in the integration of women into the various sectors of economic, social development and integration in the labour market. Hence, the role and the function of women mission network is not isolated from the political economy of the community.

⁷⁸ This story is narrated by Yangmila 37 years old. She is from Somra married to the Hoping son from Ukhrul and settled in the Ukhrul Town. Field work note December, 2017 Ukhrul.

⁷⁹ Mingthingla is a 46 years old. Field work note January,2018 Ukhrul

⁸⁰ Field work note, Ukhrul December 2017.

A.



B



C.



Figure 14: (A) Participants of CeWE weaving and tailoring training, (B) women making hand bag with *Phila kashan* and (C) Tangkhul women weaving using shuttle loom (*koll*) under CeWE project organised by TBCA women union.(Chihan Tamang).

The Tangkhul Baptist women society however not only works for the cause of women but are also tremendously engaged in the welfare of the Tangkhul Baptist Christian society in the expansion of God's mission. For instance, through the offering collected in the Friday meeting, the women of the local village church like Lunghar Baptist Church, Teinem Baptist church, Langdang Phungcham Baptist Church, Theiva Baptist Church etc., donated towards Tamu (Burma) mission compound land and fencing project (**figure 15**)⁸¹. This phenomenon highlights the relation between land and women in the Tangkhul society and its changing aspects.

In another instance, in 2013, the Teinem Baptist Church along with the women society visited Tamu Mission Field and encouraged the missionary working across Burma through prayer. They also visited the Naga Baptist Church in Tamu which is a continued effort to connect and reconnect the Tangkhul Community across the border. The Tangkhul women society also organised annual touring programs in the Tangkhul

⁸¹ *Talla* January –February 2015 Volume vii/1-2/15, Bi-monthly publication of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association. Pp-4-5.

Hills every year to connect the local village church⁸². This form of mobility and interaction is crucial not only in sustaining mission work, but also connecting the Tangkhuls in India and Burma through the various mission network.



Figure 15: Board showing TBCA mission compound Tamu Burma (Naga Baptist Church Tamu) (Source: Chihan Tamang).

There are various other activities through which the women mission seek to connect and reconnect the Tangkhul communities. For instance, TBCA *Yorla* ministry is a ministry that is engaged with women who are married outside the community in collaboration with *abundant life mission*. Miss Rinsophy Khamrang and Miss Donah Vasah work as an evangelist under this project. They undertake door to door visit for the *Yorla*⁸³. They also organise fasting programme every second Saturday which is a platform for the womenfolk who are married outside the community to reconnect with the community⁸⁴. In another instance, the Pastor's wives retreat was organised by Tangkhul Baptist Church Delhi in collaboration with Pastor's wives (Ukhrul based) in 2016⁸⁵. It was attended by twenty eight Pastor's wives from different Tangkhul

⁸² *Talla* July –August 2013 Volume vii/1-2/15, Bi-monthly publication of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association. Pp-12-13.

⁸³ Married daughter or sister is called Yorla.

⁸⁴ *Talla* March –April 2015 Volume viii/3-4/15, Bi-monthly publication of the Tangkhul Baptist Churches Association. p-4

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p-4.

Churches. The objective of the retreat includes spiritual growth, grooming physical appearance, social etiquettes and culinary skill. It is also an aim to reconnect the Tangkhuls living across the metropolitan cities. The retreat was considered a liberating experience for the Pastor's wives as there is no other platform for pastor wives to come together though they are actively engaged in mission work. Thus, such an experience also inspired the formation of pastor's wives' Association, a platform wherein pastor's wives could come together⁸⁶. The move to organise such an event in the metropolitan cities also indicates the changing pattern of people living in the Tangkhul Hills and how the church mission tries to imbibe the changes and work to engage in connecting and reconnecting the Tangkhuls.

Women and Cross Border Mission Networks

An important area in which women have come to play an important role is cross border mission. In fact, women are actively engaged in mission work across the border, while also working for the welfare of the community despite unequal power structure. Women missions utilise the expertise of women to respond to the call for mission work. They engage mostly in the teaching ministry, home visitation, women fellowship, and outreach mission to women in general. Women's society further plays an important role in local evangelistic mission and outreach mission. The women society presents a fair amount of financial support to the church and association in foreign mission, home missionary, and education project with the help of the various fundraising initiatives. The role of Tangkhul women mission in the expansion of religious geography can be traced back to 1940s when women society send Mr. Philip from Shirui village as their first missionary to Somra Tract⁸⁷. Currently, in collaboration with various Tangkhul churches and Association's, the women mission networks are actively working for the expansion of mission geography.

A series of documentary films were produced by TNBC called "TNBC Somra Tract Mission tour" based on the 'mission tour' of Kahor A. Hungyo along with the other missionaries in the Somra Tract⁸⁸. The documentary begins with the journey of missionaries from New Tusom village in India. As the journey began, it takes the

⁸⁶ Pheichon October-January Vol.4/3 2017. Publication of Tangkhul Church Delhi. Pp-11-13.

⁸⁷ TBCA women society thotchan (2018). Published by TBCA women society. P-20.

⁸⁸ "Somra Tract Mission" is a series of documentary film (part 1, 2 and 3). Produced by TNBC in the year 2012, 2014, 2015. The mission tour is organized under the theme TNBC mission breakthrough.

viewer through the landscape of India and Burma border, maps of Greater Nagalim and maps of Nagas in Burma, landscape of Somra Tract villages, Christian mission center and church, Buddhist Temple and government schools etc. The video also captures the Tangkhul Naga Somra Baptist Association (TNSBA) center, everyday life of the people of Tangkhuls in Burma and their lifestyles including the structure of the house, megalith and the pattern of wood carving which is common in the Naga Traditional housing system. The documentary also captures hardship and difficulties faced by the missionaries while travelling in Somra Tract. Hungyo, at the beginning of the third series of the documentary comment in his own words “*Sometimes Somra Tract became to be a peacock dancing place, but the peacock dancing place is very slippery so precaution is necessary*”. This also indicates the hardship faced by the missionary in the expansion of mission geography in Burma.

The transportation facilities such as *Luna* (two wheeler) popularly used in Burma are recorded in the film. The women in the Sunday church service are seen wearing *Chongkhom Kachon* (traditional Tangkhul shawl) and *Kashan*. Many men in the Somra Tract are filmed wearing *lungi*. The missionaries are also seen engaging in giving out aid and clothes to the Pastor’s wives and elders. Hungyo repeatedly says in the documentary that “*nathum Tangkhul Kashan Kachon Ngavaida khalei hi leishilaka*” (expressing love and appreciation for wearing Tangkhul traditional attire)⁸⁹. The documentary in a way connects the viewer into the recreation of missionary’s journey and the intimate relation with the people from Somra Tract. This documentary film produced by the missionary bring a strong sense of belonging and connection, while encouraging the community to be involved in the mission work across the border. The images of women wearing traditional *kashan* and *Kachon* endeared the hearts of the womenfolk and reaffirmed the relationship of the Tangkhuls divided by border (**figure 16**). The documentary film also shows missionaries preaching the gospel in church and having the conversation with the local people in the roadside while distributing sweets. Conversation with the church elders and deacon reveals the notion of oneness and reaffirming the idea of Tangkhul. The movement and mobility of the Christian missionaries in Burma thus also links to the larger aspect of an imagined Tangkhul community.

⁸⁹ Somra Tract mission documentary film part -3. Produced by TNBC in the year 2015.

A



Figure 16: (A) picture showing Tangkhuls (Burma) women wearing Tangkhul Tradition attire with the necklace in the background while young children wearing *Malao* with Tangkhul Naga hairstyle. (Source: Ninglum Wungkhai).

B



Figure 16: (B) Tangkhul women wearing Tangkhul attire and welcoming the guest at New Somra village Burma (Source: Ninglum Wungkhai).

A focus on the story of some of the women provides important insight into the nature of mission work, forms of mobility as well as the way women encounter while evangelizing. For instance, Ms. Pangamla, a 27 year old woman from Ukhrul work in the Somra Tract as an evangelist after completing her Master of Theology (M.Th.) from South India. She is engaged in college and school campus mission by teaching English language and study the Bible with women and children. Through this mission, women are given basic distance theological training of six months to a year. Besides, the women Bible study group visit the churches from village to village as part of preaching the gospel and also distributes the Bible. The mission tour in a process becomes a training ground for the women where they later work in Sunday school and women mission. She said commitment to serve as an evangelist is simply a call by faith and the right thing to do. People are welcoming and there is a strong sense of connection and belongingness among the Tangkhuls in Somra especially the older one⁹⁰. Mrs. Zingsochon is a 35 years old women and a mother of two child. She is married to a man from Somra whom she met during her theological studies. Her husband is a chaplain in Naga fellowship Yangon. She said “social and religious setting in Burma is strongly embedded in the gender hierarchy division where men dominate therefore asserting the women space is difficult... I am happy that God chose me, He had led my family in the journey as missionary on every step” she added⁹¹. Missionaries such as Ms. R. Wungsek runs an orphanage and prayer house in the heart of Ukhrul, and is involved in the children and healing ministries. Her song and testimonies shared in religious gathering inspired many youths. Mrs. N. Tangvah is another missionary working amongst the HIV positive widow and orphan station in Imphal. The ministry encourages the HIV positive patient through prayer and make space for themselves, especially where stereotype exists against HIV patients in the society. They also educate the people about the importance of medication and sources to avail free medication⁹². These instances indicate that how individual women are also plays an important role evangelising process. Thus, despite constrains, women missionaries are actively engaged in the expansion of religious geography and assert their agency within the structure. They further exerted power in the community by

⁹⁰ Field work note 18, November 2017, Imphal Manipur.

⁹¹ Worin school campus 28, December 2017, *Ngaphar* Ukhrul District, Manipur.

⁹² Tangkhul Baptist Church Mission day Report 2018.

creating women-only spaces. Another important aspect is that women missionary also play an important role in connecting the community by utilising feminine capital.

Despite the active engagement in the mission work, women missionaries are however regularly not employed as independent missionary across the border or within the community; unless they are married and work as an accomplice to their husband, regardless of theological background. The mission association does not recruit women in foreign mission especially in Somra Mission Project as they are considered to be vulnerable and incompatible to travel in the deplorable road condition. Financial instability is seen as another important contributing factor as a result women are not actively seen engaged in cross border mission field-work. Besides many of the women missionary prefer to work in the urban settings rather than the rural areas. The other important aspect is that women missionaries discontinue their service once they are married, therefore their service is much shorter compared to men⁹³. Thus, many mission association prefers to employ men for long term cross border mission work. Many women in the community feel that cross-border mission is too risky for the women to indulge in as it require travelling from one place to another and also most of them work as ‘underground missionary’. For instance, Rinsochon narrates that she always have to be alert when she enters into interior Myanmar for mission work even though the villagers informs her about the coming of the Burmese army prior to their arrival: “There is always a risk indulge or involve in the mission work and my parents are worried about my work”.⁹⁴ The notion that women needs to be protected is strongly embedded in the religious setting. Some women feel that they are more comfortable with their male pastor or evangelist and claim that they are more capable of holding the church administration.

Role of Women in Common Identity Consciousness

This section broadly discusses the role of Tangkhul Baptist women in the formation of common identity among the Tangkhul community across the border and their role in shaping women movements. The Tangkhul Baptist women society has great influence in the formation of Tangkhul *Shanao Long* (apex body organisation for all Tangkhul women). The Baptist women mission cultivates the new form of ideology

⁹³ In conversation with Nganingshing. Ukhrul, November, 2017.

⁹⁴ Field work note November 2017, Ukhrul.

based on common sisterhood and self-realisation for the need of the women to come together for the vindication of women's rights. It also aims to fight against the unjust treatment against the common citizen by the external forces. This response was shaped and strengthened by the injustices experienced by the Nagas as a new form of nationalism emerged in the post independent era. The emergence of the underground movement in the Naga Hills resulting in regular clashes between the Indian state security forces and the undergrounds. Against this backdrop, the Government of India passed a series of law as part of government counter-insurgency strategy. For instance, The Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) was first implemented in 1958 in an effort to suppress the Nagas demand for independence in the Naga inhabited area along the India and Burma border, which was later extended to the entire Northeast India region (Shimray, 2005; Farrelly, 2009). The imposition of the AFSPA was followed by reports of human rights violations suffered by the people of the state in the hands of the Armed Forces (Haksar & Hongray, 2011). The Tangkhuls, along with the rest of the people of the state suffered heavily. There was constant raid, armed vigil, allegation of torture against the civilian, sexual harassment and rape against the women by the Border Security Forces (BSF) as the people remained the 'other' in the nation building. For instance, the incident like the rape of Miss Rose⁹⁵ by border security forces and violence committed against the Grihang and Ngapurum villagers situated in the India and Burma border by the Indian Armed Forces led to organised public meeting on 9th April 1974 at the Tangkhul Long ground. It is reported that "*shipai bing na masakhangayi sayurwui otsak eina samikahai hi shanao mangli maningla kha yur saikorali kachipatna da khuiya*"⁹⁶ (which means such an act of violence committed by the armed forces is considered as not only shaming the womenfolk but also toward the men of the community and the nation)⁹⁷. Subsequently, they submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India seeking justice for the victim. They also made a collective decision to form an East district *Shanao Long* (women organisation). The president of the Tangkhul Naga

⁹⁵ Ms. Rose is a maiden from Ngapurum Khullen village in Ukhrul district situated in the border region between the India and Burma border. She was gang raped in the house of Mr. R. Khasung in the night of 4 March 1974 by the officers of 95 Border Security Force. Rose committed suicide on 6 March 1974 as she is unable to shattered by the heinous act and unable to cope with the trauma.

⁹⁶ Tangkhul *Shanao Long* thotchan (history) (1999) published by History of Tangkhul Communities Tangkhul *Shanao Long*. P-7.

⁹⁷ There is a deep rooted connection between the figure of women and national identity. This also indicates that the Women's bodies all hold immense significance in the society where the responsibility for the protection of their chastity and honour rests on the shoulders of men.

Long Mrs. Kongsui Luithui in consultation with Northern Tangkhul Naga Baptist Association (NTNBA) women promoter Miss. K. Sarah decided to work for the formation of apex women organisation⁹⁸. Subsequently, a meeting was held on 23rd April 1974 at Mrs. A. R. Kanmila vice chairperson women society residence chaired by K. Sarah. In the TNBC pastor retreat held at Chingjaroi Baptist Church in 1974, Sarah the women promoter of NTNBA women society informed about the Khumram and Grihang village incident and called for a public meeting for all the east district villages at Ukhrul Vimala Hall on 8th may 1974⁹⁹. She also gave out the circulation for public meeting to all the chief of the east district Tangkhul villages. This indicates that religion plays an important role for the welfare of the Tangkhul community beside social and political aspect of the community interlace with religion. Therefore, the binary between religion, social and culture aspect are blur many a times. Christianity also play an important role in the formation of social and political identities within the community. The expenditure of the food for the meeting was borne by the Manipur East Autonomous District Council (MEADC) while the Phungyo Baptist Church deaconess initiated in collecting vegetables and firewood which is contributed by the women church member. The meeting was attended by seven hundred and three representatives from ninety villages. As a result on 8th May, 1974 East District Women Association (EDWA) was formed with the objective: “*shanao wui mashun makhui kashung meida leikhavai, ngashan reisang khavai, worthem mataisangmei khavai kala yur otngarut mathameida khuitheishap khavaina*”,¹⁰⁰ which means to fight for justice, protection of women’s dignity and life of the Tangkhuls in general, to improve the education of women and to work for the cause of Naga. With the formation of EDWA, the Tangkhul women fought for the protection and promotion of the human rights of their people. They also started involving themselves in other socio-political issues concerning them under the aegis of this organisation. The name EDWA was changed into Tangkhul *Shanao Long* (TSL) in 1981 with a view to encompassing all the Tangkhul women including women living outside the district and state¹⁰¹. The first task of the association was to demand the immediate arrest and punishment of the BSF personals involved in the rape of Ms. Rose by organising a public rally. The association also took up various

⁹⁸ Tangkhul women History (1996). Published by history Committee Tangkhul *Shanao Long*. P-8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* P-9

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* P-10

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p-16

special problems affecting the society at large, apart from human rights issue. For instance, the *Nisha bandh* movement (bandh on liquor) which was gaining momentum amongst the Meitei in the valley of Manipur also influenced the region¹⁰². EDWA also began to spearhead a similar movement in Ukhrul District though the idea of *Nisha bandh* in the Ukhrul revolving around the Christian teaching and faith. The TSL also actively engages with Naga People Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) for the cause of the community. The TSL also engages in the peace and reconciliation movement not only among the Indian armed forces and Naga nationalist but also within different Naga national's faction and civil societies where men cannot assert their authority. Therefore, through engagement in socio-political, Human Rights and women's rights activities, certain aspect of commonness on the ground of identity emerge among the community¹⁰³.

The Baptist women society and the TSL are interdependent of each other while working simultaneously, for the cause of women. They engage in educating the rights of the women through various seminar projects. The topic of the TSL seminar are often intertwined with Christian faith and issues related to women in everyday affairs. For instance, the seminar organised by the TSL in collaboration with the WCSRC held in Ukhrul district during 1979 was under the theme "women's participation in church and society".¹⁰⁴ This reflects the existing nature of the society and the relationship between the church, mission network and the civil society and makes us understand how religious structure has influence outside the church¹⁰⁵.

Since the inception of the TSL, they have actively engaged in human rights, peace and reconciliation movement and worked for social cause across the border. Through the work of the TSL today, women are making space in the village court which was considered to be the male domain. For instance, on 2015 in an unprecedented and historic move in the Tangkhul hills, Ringui villager allowed the women of the village to be elected as members in *Hangva shim* (village assembly). The village also

¹⁰² *Tangkhul Shanao Long thotchan* 8th may 1974-February 1999. Published by History Communities Tangkhul Shanao Long.p-13.

¹⁰³ For similar studies on identity formation through the prism of human right see Sharples, R. (2017). To be Karen in the Thai–Burma borderlands: identity formation through the prism of a human rights discourse. *Asian Ethnicity*, 18(1), 74-94.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.p-23

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*. P-23

resolved that the church should not discriminate against women by denying them their right to hold high position in the religious structure on the ground of gender.¹⁰⁶ Therefore it was resolved that the church should open up the position of deaconess and Pastorship to women. It was also emphasised that the participation of women in the decision making of the society is vital to the overall development of the society. In the same line, the village of Lunghar allowed the women folk to participate in the annual public meeting since 2014 for their participation in the protection of village public Land especially Phangrei Hills from chromite mining and the dispute over sharing of natural resources between various agencies.¹⁰⁷ The exposure of women to the public sphere has shaped not only the religious space but also the social and political scenario by transforming silence into action. The autonomy and agency do not always have to be outside or against the structure; it can be within the structure. Thus women participation in the religious structure or mission networks not only play an important role in expansion of mission geography but produced new form of social mobility and new ways of expressing women's interest within the structure in many aspect of social and religious life.

¹⁰⁶ <http://kanglaonline.com/2015/01/tangkhul-village-decides-to-allow-women-in-apex-village-decision-making-body/>

¹⁰⁷ This incident is narrated by the president of Lunghar *Shanao Long* in 2016 when visited the village for field inspection while interning under International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) Ukhrul; also see Banerjee, P. (2016). Women, Conflict, and Governance in Nagaland. In *Government of Peace* (pp. 145-178). Routledge.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have attempted to study the role of religion in the formation of common ethnic identity among the Tangkhul community straddling the India and Burma Border. As discussed in this study, Christianity play an important role in the formation of common identity consciousness within the community. Aspects such as modern education, formation of common lingua franca and print culture etc., served as important function in the emergence of a particular 'national' language and group consciousness. Identity and religious aspects are irrevocably interrelated in supporting and reinforcing common identity consciousness within the community. Hence, religion emerged as an important aspect in connecting and reconnecting the community. Mission networks such as women union and Baptist associations play an important role in implementing group consciousness by engaging in various social, religious events, philanthropic work and projects. Mission networks also plays an important role in the enactment, cultural reinforcement and in the process reconnecting the community across the border. Women mission networks not only play an important role in the expansion of mission geography, but also produced new forms of social mobility and new ways of expressing women's interest within the structure in many aspect of social life. Everyday forms of mobility such as trade, social, cultural and religious events and cultural capital shape the cultural connectedness across the transnational boundary. As such, religion have bounded and connected the community divided by the transnational border.

The Tangkhul community encounter with colonialism and Christianity have shaped rapid social and cultural transformation in almost every aspect of life. Religion has always played a decisive role in the socio-economic, political and culture of Tangkhuls. As such since the introduction of Christianity in the Tangkhul hills it has always been central to the creation and existence of Tangkhul identity. Therefore, we cannot separate religion from social, political, cultural and economic to study a community like the Tangkhuls.

When India and Burma attained her independence from colonial rule in the year 1947 and 1948 respectively, many ethnic communities were caught up in the dialectic of

territoriality and state formation. In many communities, religion emerged as the site of reclaiming their self or community identity from the 'other'. Therefore, strong bonding of communities in terms of religion emerged especially in the production and reproduction of national identity in the borderland. Similarly, according to Horstmann (2010), Christian Karen refugees become very important agents of proselytizing in Thai Burma Borderland, whereas Christian missionaries use their cultural capital to reach out to their relatives, friends and to the imagined community of Christians. The resistance towards the imposition of political and religious ideologies from the external force itself strengthened the existing socio-cultural and politico-religious bond within the community. In this context, we can situate the Tangkhul Community, located in the edge of two major religions i.e., Hindu and Buddhism and their aspiration to form a common Christian state which is closely linked to the formation of pan Naga identity.

Modern education brought by the missionaries is one of the significant contributing factors that has been made by the Christian missionaries in the Tangkhul hills. It enabled the formation of group consciousness and self-realisation based on certain ideology which the people acquired through modern education. It not only enabled connecting the community from diverse villages but also moulded and led to the emergence of the educated elite. Further with the coming of Christianity, political consciousness among the elite group arose. Foregrounding on the Christian faith with the banner of 'Nagaland for Christ' the idea of formation of greater Nagalim came into being.

The protestant practices of emphasising on reading the Bible, understanding and interpretation have encouraged the printing of Bible in diverse vernacular languages. In the case of Tangkhuls, the American Baptist mission supported printing of Bible and Hymn in Hunphun dialect. Print culture as such served as an important function in the emergence of a particular 'national' language, supplanting or dominating large-scale regional variations in dialect. The introduction and formation of common Tangkhul language through the written form enhanced a sense of belongingness among the community in India. The people who had earlier found it difficult in comprehending another village dialect now became capable to understand one another. As such, they gradually became conscious of the people in their particular

language-field, and at the same time developed the sense of belongingness. This is one of the most important factors that contributed to the formation of identity consciousness in the community. Thus, the introduction of print culture enabled in the strengthening of group consciousness among the people who shared common entities. It also enabled them to connect with the outside world.

The establishment of a common *lingua franca* along with print culture also led to the *formation* of various civil society and religious associations such as Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL, Tangkhul Tribal Council), Tangkhul Literature Society, Women associations, Tangkhul Baptist Christian association, Tangkhul Naga Baptist Associating etc., which is an apex body of the Tangkhul organisation led by the native educated elite. These organisations served as a channel to connect the Tangkhul community through the bond of moral values shaped by social and religious obligation. TNL also established a court of justice (Tangkhul Tribal Court) to solve and settle cases within the Tangkhul Naga region based on the customary laws and with the elements of modern laws. However, many a time it did not transcend the international boundary, although the notion of common ethnic identities and the social, political and cultural bond between them are very strong. Thus, while the organisations strengthened the bond of Tangkhul community living in India as the guardian of customary law and civil organisation, the organisations authorities and power are limited (in India) due to the complexities of border dynamic. Therefore, like many other borderland communities in South East Asia, Tangkhul communities also encounter different facet of complexities which needs constant negotiation in everyday life. Thus, Tangkhul Christian associations emerged as the federation of all the Tangkhul's and significantly enhanced the common identity consciousness among the community.

Christian mission networks emerged as the agency to connect, strengthen and reinforce ethnic identities across the border. It engaged in various projects and activities which is a constant collective effort. Through the intersection of ethnic church, the power of Christian ethical dimension and social values, powerful group consciousness developed among the community. This shows that the ethnic and religious aspects are irrevocably interrelated in supporting and reinforcing ethnic identity consciousness. The mission networks are also instrumental in consolidating

group unity, powerfully catalysing a sense of exclusive group identity and consciousness among its members. Christianity provided legitimation for Tangkhul culture and moral values, thereby supporting a sense of common ethnic identity and group consciousness. Thus, the church also plays an important role in transmitting and reinforcing traditional cultural elements which helps to support a sense of ethnic identity.

The mobility of the Christian missionaries and the role of mission organisation also opens up to the question of the paradox of modern boundaries. The forms of connection and movement of people across the border also highlight the interconnection between identity, space and religion. Thus, the notion of border presented by the state as rigid and static is often in contrary to the reality of the community living in the border. This dichotomy of the borderland makes the existing nature and understanding of border more complex. Borders which is often seen in the realm of state-centric perspective such as security or core to peripheries perspective often have the other side of the narrative. In this study, the Ukhrul district situated in the peripheries or margin of the Indian state is the core of the Tangkhul community. Most of the people (as per my findings) does not consider Tangkhuls in Burma as 'other' and for them interacting with Somra is a part of everyday life. In fact, for them 'other' is the migrant from the other part of the Indian state. Therefore, the border which is the marker of control is also a site of resistance and resources for the borderland community.

The existing nature of mobility across the India and Burma border by the range of people such as missionaries, students, local trader indicates that border is also sites of opportunities and resources. The students imparting free education from the school run by the Baptist Christian mission Association is one such example where the community used borders as the resources. The act of mobility practiced by the student across the border indicates that border crossing empowers this 'transnational community'. The community enjoys 'dual citizenship' fostered by the kinship relation, societal connectedness base on common ethnic identity. In the same line, Horstmann & Wadley (2006) also describe the dual citizenship and border-crossing amongst 'enclave populations' on the Thai-Malaysian border and highlight the

liberating aspects of border crossing practices. Thus, border crossing is intimately linked with liberation and the changing ideas of space.

Further the formation of the Baptist women society gave women the platform in the religious sphere and to engage in various activities. The women society worked for the emancipation of women and nation building process through education and various projects. Participation in various religious events generated and facilitated the new form of mobility for women. Missionary mobility across the border also indicate the embodied ideas about freedom of movement and expression. Thus, missionary mobility also is closely linked with the formation of common Tangkhul identity.

The formation and the function of Christian mission networks indicate how the local mission network such as women society is also closely associated with the global aspect. Global Christian network brings the visitor to the Tangkhul hills and North East India from other parts of the world as part of preaching tours, exchange programme, etc. For instance, in commemoration of TBCA women society pre-centenary celebration in April 2013, Christian leaders from the various region including foreign nationals participated in the event. The speakers were Revd. Dr. Steven Van Ostran USA, Dr Edwin Tegenfeldt, a missionary in India from America among other¹⁰⁸. Today the function of the local church and mission networks are as such also intimately connected with the global Christian networks.

¹⁰⁸ Hueiyen News Service / Newmai News Network <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=24..150412.apr12>

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