



Colonial Modernity and Missionary Literature:

Constructions of History, Population, and Territory in North-East India, 1836-1945

A thesis submitted to the Department of English, University of Hyderabad in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctorate of Philosophy Degree

by

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May 2022



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I, **Hamari Jamatia**, hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis titled “**Colonial Modernity and Missionary Literature: Constructions of History, Population, and Territory in North-East India, 1836-1945**” carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Siddharth Satpathy** is an original and independent research work. I also declare that no part of this work has been submitted previously in part or in full in this university or any other institution for the reward of a degree or diploma.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Titled *Colonial Modernity and Missionary Literature: Constructions of History, Population, and Territory in North-East India, 1836-1945*, the thesis studies the formation of modernity in colonial North-East India. The period of study begins in 1836 when the first American Baptist Christian missionaries entered Assam, and concludes in 1945 with the consolidation of the Baptist church at Golaghat, where a substantial Christian population was formed. This period witnessed rapid changes in the social and cultural fabric of the region, and saw its transition into colonial modernity. The thesis will undertake an extensive study of narratives produced by the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) and formulate its arguments about the formation of colonial modernity in the region.

The missionaries in the North-eastern states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Meghalaya carried out an extensive and successful enterprise from 1836 onwards to proselytize the population of the region. There were personal and professional demands on the missionaries to document and record their stay in India. They, therefore, created a vast body of narratives that offers readers multiple discourses. From writing about their arrival in India to representing their interactions with the natives, this body of missionary narratives encapsulates the history and progress of the region in the nineteenth century under colonial conditions.

There exists a substantial body of work on the Christian missions to North East India. Many of these works engage with the impact of proselytization in the region in the inter-related fields of education, culture, politics, and identity formation. In recent years, some scholars from the region have undertaken the project of finding linkages between the North-East's colonial past and its current aspirations. They have also tried to study the influence of Christianity on certain individual communities. These works have emerged from the disciplines of social

sciences and theology. The present thesis learns from and builds on them. Having said that, it makes a crucial departure from the existing body of works. It seeks to engage with the literariness of the missionary narratives and explore how they aided the development of various literary genres. In the process, it makes a case for literary analysis of colonial modernity in India, and for missionary writings' place in the global nineteenth-century literary scene.

1.1 On the convenience of terminology

This project started with a preoccupation with the semantics of “North-East” as an identity for the people who, like me, hail from the region. It is a term used to collectively refer to the eight separate states of Eastern India—Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim. Sikkim was added in 2002 but prior to that, the term referred strictly to the other seven states. Before air travel became possible, the area was connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor called the “Chicken’s neck”. The difficulty in passage served as an apt metaphor for the physical and cultural distances between the two geographical landmasses.

Using the term rather than the state names became a convenient way of simplifying the complexity of the area. However, this convenience came at the cost of solidifying the erroneous belief that the inhabitants of the area are culturally and linguistically identical to each other. Whereas, the reality is that the region is inhabited by more than 200 tribes who speak many different languages. Each tribe has its own set of challenges, conflicts, and modes of worship and beliefs. However, from the time the British entered the region, the area was at different times called Assam Province and North-East Frontier. After India’s Independence, the term “North-East” became the preferred term as it unified the different tribes and language groups into a geographical bond.

The initial impetus for this thesis was to provide a background of how “North-East” came to become a marker of identity. However, as time passed, the thesis increasingly began to explore the nature of colonization experienced by the region: What was the relationship between colonized regions and the semantics associated with it? What were the circumstances that led to the emergence of the North-East as a geographical unit? What powers were at play to redefine the social and literary understanding of the region?

The project studies the discursive concepts and practices which over the years have shaped our understanding of North-East India. In particular, I explore the century-long discursive history of the region and how the people, missionaries and natives, came to experience modernity. I analyze three such discourses in particular, those of “history”, “population,” and “territory,” which were crucial to forming its identity. I treat these discourses as important markers of the historical experience known as colonial modernity. In this thesis, I also study the complex relationship between missionary literature, its writing style, and its impact on the way these discourses are constructed and disseminated.

1.2 The backdrop

Two major turning points in the history of North-East India occurred with the arrival of the British in 1826. Firstly, the British administration gained control of Assam following the treaty of Yandabo.¹ They established their dominion over the administration of the state which was a princely kingdom surrounded by hills where numerous tribes resided. The bureaucracy realized that it had to secure its supremacy over competing colonizers to safeguard its interests in the area. In addition, they had to ‘protect’ Assam from the neighbouring hill tribes of Naga

¹ It was a peace treaty signed in 1826 between Burma and British India following the First Anglo Burmese War. Under this treaty, Burma, which had attacked Assam, ceded its presence from North-East India. The British began to control the whole of Assam following the signing of the treaty.

Hills and Garo Hills who frequently attacked what had now been declared British frontiers. The English Commissioner to Guwahati, Captain Jenkins, figured that the only way to tame the population and establish a secure governance would be to devise a missionary intervention. He believed that the advent of Christianity would make it easier to subdue the population residing in the neighbouring hills who had thus far remained independent of any political ruler, be it the Indian Hindu kings of the old order or the British Queen of the nineteenth century. He, therefore, invited the American Baptist Mission to send its evangelists to Assam. This led to the second agency of colonialism—the missionary enterprise—establishing its station at Sadiya (Assam). Over the course of the century the two agencies propelled North-East India towards the historical experience of colonial modernity where the populace experienced drastic changes on its economic, political, and socio-cultural fronts. The beginning of colonization of the North-East thus operated, like many other colonized places, as a joint project between the economic, political and the religious wings of the colonial enterprise. North-East was a particularly successful story as the evangelizing mission led to mass conversion of the majority of the population in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya.²

1.3 Scope of work

As stated earlier, the two principal agents of colonial modernity in India and the North-East were the colonial government and the evangelical mission. Both agencies created an extensive body of literature where they narrated their observations of the people and their experiences in the colonies. While the narratives of the colonial state highlight their engagement with secular governmental projects, evangelical missions wrote about the

² Data from Census 2001 available at the website of Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Ministry of Home Affairs. According to the report, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram have the highest percentage of Christians per state population in India.

pastorates that they established in different parts of the North-East. In the last couple of decades post-colonial critics working on India have largely focused on the deployment of official narratives and have also analyzed the nationalist responses to it. The role of the missionary enterprise in the evolution of colonial modernity has received less attention. This despite the fact that since the earliest years, the missionary enterprise immersed itself in the massive production and circulation of missionary narratives in a wide variety of genres, ranging from ethnographic narratives to geographical accounts, from formal annual reports, to informal letters, from memoirs, to autobiographies, and photographs. These narratives, with a variety of generic affiliations, produced and mobilized by the missionaries are imbricated in the historical processes of building imperial discourses about the North-East.

In the context of the North-East, many studies have been taken to analyze the impact of Christianity on the socio-cultural aspects but such studies pay less than adequate attention to the literariness of the narratives themselves. Missionary literature covered a wide range of genres and styles and employed many narrative techniques to develop its effectiveness. Through my project I wish to achieve two objectives—first, to focus on the role of the missionaries in introducing modernity in the North-East and second, to highlight and study the missionary literature with respect to its genres, styles, and narrative techniques. I wish to draw attention to the literariness of the discourses that evangelical narratives helped to build in colonial situations.

1.4 Colonial modernity

Modernity in my thesis refers to the rise of institutions such as the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist economy that had its beginning in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Europe transitioned from having been an absolute monarchy to becoming a popular sovereignty. It became the birthplace of concepts that define the modern world—democracy,

citizenship, civil society, human rights, equality before the law, social justice etc. There is no escaping the European reference as it consistently acts as the dominating discourse or the ‘master narrative’ of all histories. Indeed, it is undeniable that European concepts help us understand the ways in which the nineteenth-century ushered in drastic changes in colonized societies. British imperialism preached these concepts to the territories that it colonized and projected the image of egalitarianism to justify its presence even though there were major gaps between theory and practice.

My project does not treat the European model as primary but adopts a more comparative stance. The emergence of the North-East as an identifiable region which subscribes to ideals of liberal democracy, civil law, national sovereignty, secularism etc. is a historical process that cannot be studied without a reference to the European project of modernity. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that while a closer investigation can uncover the cracks in tolling Europe as “homogenous and uncontested”, “a certain version of "Europe," reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of everyday relationships of power as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate the discourse of history” (28).³ It is in this pretext that modernity in India, too, is appraised under the shadow of the European narrative. Being subjected to colonialism, the experiences of once-colonised lands are studied under the purview of colonial modernity. There is, however, a consensus that not all modernities emerged in a similar fashion and while the North-East had its special forms, it cannot be studied in isolation from the historical processes at work in the rest of India during the nineteenth-century. In the chapters to follow I shall take up each emblem of modernity, namely population, territory and gender, central to its existence, and try to understand the power structures that operate around them.

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Post-Colonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Univ Press, 2000.

I derive much of the understanding of colonial modernity from the works of two Post-Colonial thinkers—Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee—who have written about governmental forms of colonial modernity and the nationalist responses to it. Ranajit Guha has addressed the issue of the colonial narrative by highlighting how each state and community opened its gates to modernity in their own way that need not have been identical. In *Dominance without Hegemony* Guha studies nineteenth-century political developments in Bengal.⁴ He writes that like many concepts, modernity was also created through a sustained discourse that produced a need for it. One way in which this need was constructed was through the quest to historicize the past of the colonized lands so that it can be devalued in comparison to Western history. White colonial historians began the task of recording the history of Bengal and focused on presenting it as a lower civilization whose level could be raised only by adopting Western ideals. In the beginning it seemed like a favorable situation for the British because history was thoroughly appropriated by them and colonization began to be seen as a necessary prelude to move Bengal towards modern civilization. The paradox of such a colonial historicist consciousness was, however, that the colonized, inspired by a nationalist sentiment, soon began to “define and affirm their own identity” (3) by creating an alternate history. There began a battle of constructing historical narratives about the past; and, Guha concludes, it was the “one Indian battle that Britain never won” (1) as Bengali nationalist intellectuals successfully came up with an alternate narrative that denied appropriation at the hands of the colonizers.

In *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*, Partha Chatterjee argues that the period of “colonial modern” in India began in the 1830s.⁵ Colonial modernity is marked by three prominent features. First, “the Indian economy at this time acquires the form

⁴ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, 1998.

⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*, Princeton Univ Press, 2012.

of a characteristically colonial economy: the flow of colonial trade has been reversed from the export from India of textiles and luxuries to the export of primary agricultural products and import of industrial manufactures from Britain, and the structure of colonial agrarian property, revenue, credit and commodity exchange are fully in place” (76). Second, “Politically, the British power is established as paramount all over the sub-continent—a violent process of warfare, conquest, and suppression of rebellion, and unequal treaties—with its associated consequences in terms of the symbols and practices of sovereignty and law that bring about a profound transformation in the character of government and politics” (76). Third, “Intellectually, the institutions of colonial education spread from the mid-nineteenth century as the breeding ground of new cultural styles and movements that create the Indian middle classes as well as shape an entire range of nationalist responses to colonial rule” (76). The period included an emphasis on pedagogy: natives were in the need to be trained into civilizational excellence. Chatterjee describes two distinct phases of the colonial pedagogical project, ‘pedagogy of violence’ and ‘pedagogy of culture’ and asserts that the former always necessarily preceded the latter (187). And, it is in the latter phase that Bengali nationalists produced alternative narratives about their past as well as present. In this work, Chatterjee analyses one such pedagogy of culture in the shape of the Bengal theatre that emerged in the nineteenth Century as a nationalistic response towards the appropriation of Indian history by the British. Writers such as Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Dinabandhu Mitra, Nabinchandra Sen, Rameschandra Dutt, and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay attempted to seize back the representation of history by coming up with nationalistic protagonists who questioned the veracity of the British rule. As a result, the colonial government began to be concerned enough to survey Bengal theatre and issue censorship on what could be written/expressed and what could not.

In his earlier book, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee had highlighted this very paradoxical experience that dominated colonial modernity in India. While modernity brought with it the modular forms of modern institutions, at the same time the colonial enterprise could not implement them in practice as the very source of colonial power consisted in the postponement of the ideas of equality and liberty.⁶ This postponement or deferral was marked by the rule of colonial difference. The colonial government, therefore, masked the inherent subjugation of the natives by the assertion that British rule in India was necessary “to train the people of India to govern and protect themselves” (14). Colonisation emphasized on the “lack” of preparedness among native population that made them incapable of self-rule. Part of this tactic included the prohibition of literature that would question the legitimacy of colonial rule.

Partha Chatterjee also observed that anti-colonial nationalism developed because while colonialism managed to capture the public domain, the inner sanctums such that that of culture and family remained free from foreign interference. Chatterjee divided social institutions into two domains—the material and the spiritual, the outer and the inner realms. He highlights that while the introduction of the techniques of modern state managed to permeate into the materiality of Indian life, the Indian population moulded an anti-colonial sentiment by denying the entry of Euro-centric modernity into the domain of the “national culture” or what he calls “the spiritual domain”. This meant that much of “Indianness” emerged from the creation of an Indian self that was not a carbon copy of the European self but a retention of traditional Indian values and beliefs in a modernized form. This, according to Chatterjee, was done through three sets of institutions—language, literature, and family units that were created by Indians in such a way that they would incorporate some European ideas but would retain their Indian nature. These three institutions also became the site of the pedagogy of culture that Chatterjee writes

⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton Univ. Press, 1993

about in *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power*. The growth in the education sector, the rise of Bengali theatre, and social revivals played a major role in triggering the anti-colonial movement in Bengal. However, these movements were restricted to the elitist circle of middle-class Bengalis who were English-educated and who had ingrained European sensibilities into their culture. On the other side of the spectrum were the lower classes who were also grappling with the colonial modern.

The 1980s marked a new historiography under the aegis of Subaltern Studies that worked on the peasant movements in India. According to the members of the study group headed by Ranajit Guha, the mainstream narrative of modernity till that time had only focused on the elitist writings by members of the dominant classes, thereby neglecting the political role played by the vast majority of peasants in India who, too, had a stake in the making of modern India. Subaltern studies challenged the widely accepted view that it was the elitist group of educated nationalist leaders who transformed India from its primitiveness and ushered it into the phase of modernity. This understanding limited the reach of nationalism to a select few and negated the efforts and contribution of the “mass of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in town and country—that is, the people” (4). It also overlooked the simultaneous existence of the “undemocratic” relations that maintained the exploitative relationship between the elite and the subalterns. Subaltern studies, thus, tried to give voice to the under-represented classes that did not figure in much of the nationalistic narratives.

One of the issues that subaltern studies highlighted was how the genealogy of peasants or the subalterns in India was different from European nations. Dipesh Chakrabarty in a retrospective analysis writes that the peasant in India “did not have to undergo a historical

mutation into the industrial worker in order to become the citizen-subject of the nation” (19).⁷ Unlike the subalterns of the West, those in India became “citizen subjects” of the nation without experiencing the transformation from a feudal set up to an industrial economy. A majority of the Indian population continued to be involved in primitive forms of agriculture. Subaltern Study highlights that despite these differences in its evolution, the subaltern population or peasants were active political entities as they took mass participation in the making of a modern nation. They were instrumental in the success of nationalistic movements that prepared the grounds for Independence.

As with subalterns, the indigenous population of many parts of North-East became citizen subjects of a nation without either becoming industrial workers, or experiencing the mass nationalistic fervor usually attached to such a transformation. It is true that the people of the North-East wished to overthrow the British government and organized many tribal wars to stop the expansion of the enterprise but there were mixed reaction to the unification with India. The population were driven by political agency and thought. Assam, Manipur, and Tripura had centuries of kingship together with a taxation system and an army. The emergence of secessionist movements in states such as Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura after the independence from the British and the merger with India is testament to the political awareness of the people.

The common argument for the demand for separate independent states was that the population of the North-East was geographically, culturally and racially different from the rest of India and was coerced to join India by the British. Prabhat Datta in “Secessionist Movements in North East India” writes: “They [the secessionist outfits] claimed that neither the Hindu

⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the wake of Subaltern Studies*, Univ of Chicago Press, 2002.

norms nor any Indian traditional pattern matched with the conglomeration of the myriad ethnic tribes in the region.”⁸ Many regions erupted in armed insurgency to counter the neo-colonization under the Indian government. The modern histories of Tripura, Nagaland, and Mizoram bear witness to the bloodshed and riots that took place in the aftermath of India’s Independence. The question therefore is: how did a vast majority of the population in these states identify themselves as ‘different’ from others in mainland India? What is the basis of this political awareness? Where were the developments in the nineteenth century that led to the formation of a civil society when then demanded separate nationhoods?

In all the nationalist studies, writers have drawn their inferences from official bureaucratic and nationalist archives but postcolonial critics have seldom taken note of the voluminous body of narratives produced by the Christian evangelical missions to India and the role they played in the making of Indian historiography. This project is not so much to point out a lacuna in their works but rather to highlight the necessity of delving into the mission archive. It may lead to more searching questions about the nature of colonial modernity. For instance, through this project I would like to ask if postcolonial writers, in devaluing the role of the colonial government in the domain of Indian spirituality, tend to ignore the fact that evangelical missions, another agent of colonial modernity, were working in close proximity to the inner realm. The missionary enterprise functioned by setting up institutions in the vicinity of people’s homes and in some cases even set up whole new villages to facilitate the reception of the new faith. How did these institutions—churches, schools, boarding hostels and housing colonies—function to address the concerns of Indian spirituality and materiality? In fact, are materiality and spirituality, outer and inner realms really two different domains when it comes to the operations of pastoral power that shaped our experience of colonial modernity just as

⁸ Prabhat Datta, “Secessionist Movements in North East India”, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec. 1992), pages. 536-558

much as did the operations of the governmental power? Can the study of nineteenth-century missionary literature throw light on the connection between the seemingly contradictory nature of modern governance and religion?

1.5 Missionary activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth century

The introduction of modernity in the North-East required a parallel civil appeasement of the population, a job that was entrusted to the missionaries. The British, within a few years of annexing Assam, lured the missionaries by highlighting that a locality called Sadiya was prime for proselytization. Not only were the tribal population considered similar to the Burmeses among whom the Baptist Mission was already active, but the British also stated that Assam would allow them better access to China. “Here they [the missionaries] would labor under the protection of our government, and not be liable to those checks which the Rangoon Mission has constantly suffered from the jealousy and barbarity of the Ava government.... Here is an ample field. It is indeed boundless; for it extends over all the north and west of China, (for such is the extent of communication that we command from Sudiya,) and it embraces some of the most fertile and most temperate countries on the face of the earth” (20).⁹

In 1837, Captain Jenkins added that “to put an end to their (the hill tribes’) outrages, there could be no other means than a reformation of their feelings and habits through Christian religion” (XX).¹⁰ In one sweep, Captain Jenkins had outlined “a comprehensive plan to win over the missionaries with the lure of evangelical opportunities and to secure his own pet scheme of taming and disciplining the unruly hill dwellers through proselytization and

⁹ *Baptist Missionary Magazine* Vol. XVI, 1836.

¹⁰ HK Barpujari, *American Missionaries and North-East India: (1836 to 1900)*. Spectrum Publication, 1986.

evangelical activities.”¹¹ He promised the missionaries a sum of 1,000 rupees for the initial cost of establishment and another 1,000 for a printing press. In addition, Captain Jenkins agreed to provide the protection of the British Government.¹² It seemed like a win-win situation for both. The missionaries didn’t fail to give credit where it was due. In the *History of the American Missions to the Heathens from their Commencement to the Present Time*, the writers note that “Captain Jenkins has not only contributed with generous liberality for the support of the mission, but has proved himself a kind personal friend and adviser to the missionaries. Both his views and efforts with reference to the introduction of the gospel and the light of science and civilization among the natives are well worthy the imitation of men of extensive official influence” (612).¹³

This camaraderie among the Company officials and the American Baptist Mission was a drastic change from the usual East India Company’s policy to keep religion and governance separate. The company officials in the rest of the country had thus far avoided interfering in the religious beliefs of the common people as it could lead to resentment and rebellion among the latter. Therefore Jenkin’s letter to the missionaries marked the British’s complicated relationship with the Christian missionaries. On one hand the East India Company was a profit-making business enterprise that required the upkeep of its colonized territories by maintaining sepoys, securing trade relations and building infrastructure. On the other hand it also had to appease the public back home, some of whom demanded the promotion of Christianity in the

¹¹ Madhumita Sengupta, *Becoming Assamese: Colonialism and New Subjectivities in Northeast*, Routledge, 2016.

¹² In a letter by Mr. H. Pearce of the English Baptist Mission, Calcutta, to the Baptist Mission Board dated April 21, 1835, he discusses the content of Captain Jenkins’ letter and the offer of help made in it. For more, consult the Baptist Missionary Magazine, Vol. 16, January 1836.

¹³ *History of the American Missions to the Heathens from their Commencement to the Present Time*, Spooner and Howland, 1840.

new lands. There was a genuine belief that the souls of Indians would perish in the absence of Christianity.

Penelope Carson in an in-depth study of the religious debates surrounding the British Parliament, the East India Company, and the relationship they wished to share with the colonized public, states that two things happened in the eighteenth century that fueled the demand for evangelizing missions to be sent to the colonies in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ The first was the loss of America as a British Colony that was seen as a huge loss to the power and prestige of Britain. Carson writes: “By 1780, the clergy were preaching that the colossal failure of the American War proved that only a national reformation could retrieve Britain from further shame. There were efforts to restore the moral authority of Church and State and to rehabilitate Britain’s reputation” (19). It was believed that Britain lost America because its own public had become morally depraved and that amends were required urgently if Britain wanted to regain its lost glory. “The moral character of imperial authority and the ethics of British conduct started to figure in public discussions on empire with increasing frequency. The growing numbers of Evangelical Christians seized on the crisis to reinforce their arguments that only the proper observance of Christianity could solve the nation’s ills” (19). Charles Grant, a senior Company servant, was one of the key figures to fight for the rights of the evangelists.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century was marked by the rapid growth of Methodism and the new Evangelical Dissenting congregations, commonly termed ‘New Dissent’. They not only challenged the dominion of the Church of England, but were also more zealous in demanding entry into India (22). At first they demanded unrestricted residence but discovered that it only strengthened the East India Company’s resolve to keep missionaries away. In 1793 when the first missionary William Carey entered India, he was denied preaching

¹⁴ Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion: 1698-1858*, Boydell Press, 2012.

rights in British governed territories and was forced to seek shelter at Serampore (Bengal) that was under the Danish government. By the beginning of nineteenth century, however, the evangelists had begun to realize that perhaps a little compromise could lead to better gains in future. Politician, evangelist and abolitionist William Wilberforce wrote to George Burder, secretary of the LMS:

It is a most difficult question to decide upon. We may lose all by striving for too much. Yet I wish to obtain as much as possible again. It is by no means clear, that we may not enjoy more practical security for missionaries by conditions which may appear more restricted on the face of them (135).¹⁵

Meanwhile, the officials of the East India Company were opposed to any religious intervention in India. They believed that the only way to maintain peace in the country was to stay away from meddling with the personal choices of the people in matters of religion and culture. The pressure on the Company only kept increasing in the nineteenth century and when the Charter Act of 1813 was confirmed, it finally allowed the entry of more missionaries to the colonies. However, while missionaries celebrated it, according to Carson, the Charter was not as successful as it was being touted to be. It still had several restrictions on missionary activities and the East India Company retained its right to terminate the licenses “if it shall appear to them that the persons, to whom they have been granted, have forfeited their claim to countenance and protection” (147).

Some of the more relaxed attitude towards the Evangelicals was made after the famous Minute on Education by British Politician William Macaulay in 1835 which was partly prompted by religious intentions. Macaulay believed that the introduction of education would

¹⁵ Wilberforce is better known for his stand against slavery. He was a member of the British Parliament.

awaken “knowledge and reflection” among the people of Bengal to the point where “there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes of Bengal thirty years hence” (196). Missionaries therefore gained access to set up schools in the colonies but religious conversion remained a dissenting subject in the rest of India, in the North-East, missionaries received a free hand.

Captain Jenkins not only helped establish the first mission but also donated sums of money at regular intervals. In addition, he offered wastelands to the missionaries either for free or on rent for 15 to 20 years. Yet, despite the praise showered on Jenkins, Mr. Brown and Mr. Cutter, after their arrival at Assam, realized that much of the claims had been exaggerated or misrepresented. In *The Whole World Kin*, a biography of Mr. Brown constructed by stitching together his journals, letters and reports, the editor notes: “Going out soon after his arrival, in company with an English officer, to visit the surrounding villages, he (Mr. Brown) had discovered to his surprise and disappointment, that the only Shans within reach were a few scattered Khamti hamlets, and that the main body of the people for whom he had been preparing to labor, and from whose Christianization important results had been expected, lived “beyond the mountains!” (130).¹⁶ Nevertheless, the missionaries started work on starting their preaching in Assam.

The first mission at Sadiya didn’t last long as attacks by indigenous tribes in 1839 drove the townspeople and the British forces to nearby Jaipur. In order to help Brown and Cutter, and to establish more churches in the North-East, in 1837, the American Baptists sent enforcements in the form of Miles Bronson, Jacob Thomas, and their wives. But on the boat trip from Calcutta to Assam, a freak accident killed Thomas, making him the first Christian martyr in the North-

¹⁶ Nathan Brown, *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and Other Labors of Nathan Brown*, Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers Publishers, 1890. This book is dealt in more detail in chapter 3.

East. The survivors reached Assam and set up a mission in Sibsagar in 1841. Brown continued his work of evangelizing with whichever people he could reach out to, and in the next ten years, the Assam Mission had set up three mission stations at Sibsagar, Guwahati and Nawgong with the help of the colonial government.

Sometimes the missionaries had to change policies to survive in the newly colonized lands. The mutiny of 1857 equally shook the foundation of the American Baptist Missionary in Assam as it did in the rest of India. Missionary Victor Hugo Sword in *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)* writes that the mutiny created hostile environments for the white population residing in Assam irrespective of their occupation.¹⁷ The threats became so dangerous that the company officials as well as the missionaries had to flee Assam in order to save their lives. For the next ten years from 1857 to 1867 many of the missions had just one missionary or none at all.

One of the lesser known facts about the impact of the mutiny is how it shifted the focus of proselytisation from the Hinduised plains of Assam to the adjoining hills where the absence of a unified and organized religion posed a lesser threat to the British Empire than the religious awakening in Bengal. In 1867, the missionaries agreed to a reversal of policy and renewed their work among the “sturdy hill men whose minds had not as yet been indoctrinated by Hinduism” (91). This was how the missionaries began to increasingly enter the denser hills where they were free to preach and convert without expecting an armed mutiny. This shift in focus had a huge impact on the social fabric of the North-East as more and more tribes began to convert to Christianity.

¹⁷ Victor Hugo Sword, *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)*, Spectrum Publications, 1992.

1.6 Missionary studies in the North-East

This section shall look at some of the previous works relevant to the project. There has been substantial work done on researching the impact of missionaries on the region. Scholars have been trying to understand the changes brought in by Christian missionaries and have usually studied it in terms of binaries. For instance, historian Sajal Nag has criticized the missionary enterprise and accused it of destroying the traditional culture of Northeastern populations by wiping out modes of worship, kinship and lifestyles. In *Contesting Marginalities*, Nag claims that the emphasis of the British was “to structurally destabilize the tribals while a superficial policy of non-interference in their life and culture was followed” (53).¹⁸ He adds that the coming of the missionaries hastened the process of de-tribalization. The techniques through which this was done are education, road connectivity, trade, and land reforms that made the traditional cultures obsolete. By changing the mode of production, the British managed to reduce the frequency of tribal wars and raids between the hills and the plains. The Britishers established trade marts at the foothills where tribals could barter and sell their commodities that were later supplied to other parts of India via the new roads that were constructed. Nag concludes that the emergence of the “middle class” in the North-East was a result of these policies that came at the cost of tribalism. He reiterates this point in his latest book *The Uprising* where he writes that Christianity destroyed indigenous culture and religion while also encouraging the modern notions of education, medicine, and hygiene.¹⁹ According to Nag, the missionaries were more ruthless in their attempts to detribalize the North-East as they were committed to reforming the society. “The first target of the missionaries ... was the religious practices, social systems and the fabric of indigenous tradition and custom. They

¹⁸ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-east India*, Manohar and Distributors, 2002.

¹⁹ Sajal Nag, *The Uprising: Colonial State, Christian Missionaries, and Anti-Slavery Movement in North-East India (1908-1954)*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

attacked it, ridiculed it, and vilified it, which the colonial state refused to do as it would jeopardize the empire” (xxiii). One of the important traditions that disappeared as a result of the rise of the bourgeoisie was the dormitory for young unmarried men among the Nagas who were trained in warfare and other skills. The abolition of head-hunting and the reduction in tribal wars made the dormitory unnecessary. Other changes included attire, mode of nature worship, orality and the local customary justice system.

While Nag is critical of the Christian influence in the North-East, at the other end of the modernity debate is theologian F.S Downs who believed that Christianity armed people with the tools to adapt to the fast-changing world around them.²⁰ According to Downs, the reason why so many communities converted to Christianity was because their old religion and culture was proving insufficient to acclimatize them to the new form of modern governance. In India as with many other places, culture and religion were often one and same. Religious beliefs dictated worldviews, lifestyle and the law. In order to find one’s position in a fast-changing world, the population required education and a strengthening of identities that was speedily realized through conversion. Downs adds that the Mizos and the Nagas managed to consolidate their communities and become more aware of one’s affinity to other members of the tribe after coming in contact with the Christian missionaries. The mission also strengthened these communities by giving impetus to their languages and literature. Indeed, Downs in sharp contrast to Nag, argues that Christianity protected the people from “detrribalization” because the changes that took place via the new religion were “external.” Downs quotes a point made by tribal intelligentsia on the debate:

Our claim is that Christianity is not spoiling our tribal selfhood, as is sometimes alleged. When we become Christians we do not get detrribalized. Instead of

²⁰ Frederick S. Downs, “Christianity as a Tribal Response to Change,” *Subba*.

Christ's teachings taking away anything of value from our tribal life, it is enriching it in many ways. (174)

Other works that deal with the debate on the advantages and the disadvantages of the missionary policy in the North-East include *Between Ethnography and Fiction: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Question in India* edited by Tanka Bahadur Subba and Sujit Som,²¹ consisting of essays by eminent writers from the North-East who attempt to understand the impact of Christianity in their respective communities. *A Re-discovery and Re-building of Naga Cultural Values* by Inato Yekhetto Shikhu and *Naga Identity* by Brij Bihari Kumar study the colonization and religious transformation among the Nagas.²² In *Deconstructing Colonial Ethnography: An Analysis of Missionary Writings on North-East India* (2017) by Hoineilhing Sitlhou, the writer undertakes the study of different Christian denominations in the North-East and examines the way in which the native culture underwent massive changes due to the interactions. As the title suggests, Sitlhou sets out to “deconstruct” missionary narratives that thoroughly undermined the local populations’ responses to colonization and dismissed their contribution to the overall spread and sustenance of the new religion. Sitlhou’s book takes a closer look at the way in which colonization was done in the ambit of culture through the “construction of otherness” in which the white missionary workers encouraged certain stereotypes about themselves that would construct them as culturally superior. This aspect of colonization, according to Sitlhou, is evident from the way the missionary enterprise began to interpose in cultural matters that had no bearing on their preaching. For example, the new converts were given English names at the time of Baptism and the population was encouraged to adhere to a more Western style of dressing. According to Sitlhou, the coming of the missionaries brought with it multiple

²¹ Tanka Bahadur Subba and Sujit Som, *Between Ethnography and Fiction: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal Question in India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006.

²² Inato Yekhetto Shikhu. *A Re-discovery and Re-building of Naga Cultural Values*, New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2007; Braj Bihari Kumar. *Naga Identity*. N.p.: Concept, 2005.

stages of cultural upheaval that exposed the power imbalances between the colonizer and the colonized as the exchange was mostly one-way. After analyzing the missionary literature of the nineteenth century, Silthou also traces the tracts written in the twentieth century that began to give a semblance of recognition to the hard work put in by native Christian workers. In writing about the North-East, Silthou manages to examine the concepts of language, literature and education under the missionaries and the multiple ways in which it impacted representation of the local culture.

The above-mentioned books have emerged from the Social Sciences discipline and are highly informative about the cultural impact of the missionaries. They, however, do not engage with the literariness of the writings. Much of the analyses of the North-East also do not place missionary literature in the overall nineteenth century literary landscape and how it reflects the concerns of the times. In contrast, this thesis places missionary writings in the cauldron of nineteenth century literature and does a textual analysis of these works.

It is important to note that writers like both Nag and Downs derive their opposing views from the same pool of missionary literature by the missionaries in the North-East from 1836 till India's Independence. My thesis is not so much an investigation into which of the two viewpoints is correct. Rather, it seeks to point out that while both missionaries and the East India Company believed that they were ushering the North-East into a modern era, they took two different routes. The British forces unleashed the "pedagogy of violence" to consolidate their empire in the North-East by waging bloody wars with the hill tribes while the Christian empire was built on the "pedagogy of culture" that permeated the social fabric through education and literature.

1.7 The Act of Religious Difference

The earliest missionary writings were a means of creating the difference between Christianity and Indian heathenism where the colonialist religion and the white pastor consolidated their position at the helm of the hierarchy. This religious difference can be seen in all works analyzed in the thesis. The understanding is derived from Gauri Viswanathan who in her book *Outside the Fold* has attempted to find a parallel between colonization and religious conversion.²³ According to her, the forces of political modernity and the forces of conversion are similar in the way they “appeal to personal (rather than collective) choice, will, and action, to the forces of colonization in its introduction of other epistemologies, ideologies, and cultural frameworks” (75). Vishwanathan adds that conversions gave the impression of the nation being “egalitarian, just, open, protective, and constitutional,” (191) by giving protection to the individual's free will to convert. Conversions therefore fueled the narrative of tolerance, so important to the consolidation of a modern nation. Yet, much like the ground realities of the Raj that thrived on colonial difference, missionaries while demanding juridical equality, thrived on religious difference.

Post-colonial readings of the missionary archives offer plenty of instances of racism, sexism and xenophobia in the earliest Christian-heathen encounters. Texts such as *The Whole World Kin* by Nathan Brown, *A Corner in India* by Mary Mead Clark, *A Garo Jungle Book* by William Carey, and *Korno Siga* by Mildred Marston establish an unequal relationship between the Christian and the heathens by creating binaries of the civilized/uncivilized, scientific/superstitious, kind/brutal, and morally upright/corrupted. Even after the missionaries began conversion of the local populations, not all Christians were deemed equal.²⁴ While the

²³ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*, Princeton University Press, 1998.

²⁴ These works, written between 1836 and 1944, are dealt in more detail in the core chapters.

natives played a significant role in the spread and sustenance of Christianity they were not truly ready to operate the pastorate without the guidance of the American missionaries. The knowledge and the interpretation of the Bible cascaded from the Americans in downward motion towards the natives who could be banished from the mission if they broke the rules but not the other way around. Godhula Rufus Brown, one of the first native converts of Assam underwent this fate when he was disqualified after years of service in 1885 for his addiction to alcohol and opium.²⁵ The Assam Mission conference report of 1886 refers to his “misconduct” without giving any details and notes his removal from the grace of the Baptist Church. In another text, *In Villages and Tea Gardens* (1945), writer Oscar L. Swanson remembers that converts such as Godhula had to be banished from the Baptist circle as Assamese converts were prone to a “lack in moral stability” (54). Tensions were at its peak towards the last decade of the nineteenth century when new missionaries from America, on their arrival to the North-East, became critical of the laxity of rules governing Baptism. Samuel A. Perrine, a new arrival from America, reached the Naga Hills in 1892 and immediately noticed that the converted heathens had not let go of their old habits. As a result, “a good many members (and) some of the most experienced preachers” were dismissed at his behest as he was opposed to the old customs of “opium eating, smoking, drinking of rice beer, and other non-Christian habits” (54). After the mass exodus of members from Molung church of Naga Hills, only four members remained, three of whom were the white Baptist missionaries themselves.

Religious difference produced the discourse of “lack” in which the natives were morally and ethically inadequate to become good Christians. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in *Provincializing Europe*, writes that this “lack” figured prominently in the nineteenth and twentieth century

²⁵ In *Good Christians and Blood-Thirsty Savages* (2016), Geraldine Forbes writes in the notes that Godhula withdrew from the American Mission in 1885. He was characterized as a drunkard and opium addict.

description of India in the colonial archives where “generations of elite Indian nationalists found their subject positions, as nationalists... between the two poles of the homologous sets of oppositions, despotic/constitutional, medieval/modern, feudal/capitalist. Within this narrative shared between imperialist and nationalist imaginations, the ‘Indian’ was always a figure of lack” (32). The missionary archive on the North-East is rife with examples of the “lack” that the tribes suffer from. Natives either lacked moral fortitude, or were prone to addiction and sacrilege in their journey towards becoming good Christians.

The colour of skin, too, contributed to the act of religious difference among the missionaries and the locals. The whiteness of the missionary preachers served as a fundamental symbol of superiority that permeated the interactions between the two. The relationship resembled the bureaucratic set-up as highlighted by Partha Chatterjee who points out that Indian judicial officers could not oversee cases involving Europeans.²⁶ Similarly, American missionaries held the decision making powers of the Missionary Board. Race was, however, more complicated in terms of the missionaries’ relationship with the people of the North-East. While the American Baptists held on to their whiteness as proof of superiority, they also had to establish themselves as different from the white colonial bureaucrats who were often at odds with the locals. Amidst the wars between the sepoys of the mercenary Raj and the tribals, the missionaries had to walk a tight line of being white and at the same time being benevolent, philanthropic and pious who were the labourers of God and not the British government. An example of this can be found in *Korno Siga, The Mountain Chief*, when the writer Mrs. Scott’s missionary husband Edward Scott tries to enter Naga territory for the first time. He is soon

²⁶ In *The Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee points out that the British bureaucracy did not allow Indian judicial officers the same rights as their British colleagues and barred them from trying cases in which Europeans were involved. The vernacular press and literature also suffered censorship as “freedom of opinion could apply only to organs of civil society” that did not include Indians.

ambushed by “a band of 20 warlike chiefs painted in hideous colours” who point their spears at him (60). Having but seconds to save his life, Scott, who was carrying a violin, places the instrument on his shoulder and begins to play “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” in front of the bewildered attackers. “The savages listened with rapt attention until he had marched slowly through the defile and past them and their uplifted spears, and as he sang and played, one after another of the spears were dropped and their owners seemed completely under the magical spell of the music and the man” (60). At the end of the performance, the chief demands to know if he was an “Englishman”, the title associated with the colonial government that was waging wars with the Nagas to which Scott replies, “No, I am an American, and have nothing to do with the setting up of a new government among you” (61).

The music and the reply relaxed the tensions among the Naga chiefs, and they allowed Scott to live in their village for two months to teach music and preach the gospel. “And thus it was that the missionary, by means of a violin, gained an entrance among a people who before this had cruelly slain every white man who had ventured among them,” Anna Scott reminisces thereby establishing the “pedagogy of culture” as the chosen instrument of colonization by the missionaries (62).

An essay titled “God’s Strange Means” by Sajal Nag, narrates a similar story of racial complexities in the Lushai Hills (modern day Mizoram) that highlights the uneasy relationship between the missionaries and the colonial government.²⁷ Nag writes that when the first missionaries arrived in Lushai Hills in 1894, they had to face extreme resentment from the native population because they were seen as agents of the British administration. At that time, following the clash between British officials and Lushai men, the “Lushais were very

²⁷ Sajal Nag, “God’s Strange Means”. *Christianity and Change in Northeast India*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, 2009.

suspicious of all White men” (288). The Mizo village elders begrudged the presence of white missionaries in the hills as the community was still opposing the presence of British in the hills. It was at this juncture that the missionaries had to prove themselves to be different from the British officials by deviating the population’s attention from the colour of their skin to the moral strength of their work while at the same time maintaining the representation of a superior culture. Nag highlights how following the years of the missionary arrival, schools began to be opened, medicines and books began to be distributed, and the “poor and oppressed hillmen” were brought (289) before authorities for redress. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Lushais “began to realize the virtues and kindness of the British people” (289).

Both stories draw attention to the uneasy role of the missionaries in the colonial setup where there was a constant pressure of being as white as the British administrative agents but at the same time being “local” enough to learn the native language and live in harmony with the population. *Korno Siga* exposes the ambivalent figure of the missionary in the manner in which his race, skin colour, education, wealth and egalitarianism face tremendous pressure of conforming to stereotypes as well as deflecting them. The missionaries seem aware of the dichotomy of their positions where they have to shift their attitudes towards the colonial state depending on the circumstances. Yet, the missionaries were also aware that in order to convert the population as well as to survive their stay in the new place, they would require a network of helpers who would believe in their enterprise. To this end, the first step was to open schools and provide education. Nathan Brown, the pioneer of the American Mission at a conference in Burma in 1853 wrote:

We are convinced that native agency is to be the principal instrument in converting the masses in heathen countries. If we would introduce among our native churches a healthy, vigorous, stable Christianity, we must have a portion

of our native ministry thoroughly educated and enlightened—men whose talents and acquirements shall be, as far as the circumstances will admit, equal to those of the missionaries themselves (397).²⁸

The first school was opened in June, 1836 just two months after the arrival of Nathan Brown and O.T. Cutter. The average number of students who attended the school fluctuated between 30-40 pupils. They were taught English, Assamese, writing and arithmetic and geography.²⁹ In keeping with the Baptist Mission policy, the missionaries chose to promote the native languages, a decision which was welcomed by the tribes.³⁰

1.8 The genre of missionary literature

Since the earliest years of the American Baptist Mission in the North-East, there was a massive production and circulation of missionary narratives in a wide variety of genres, ranging from ethnographic narratives to geographical accounts, from formal annual reports, to informal letters, from memoirs, to autobiographies, and photographs. In this huge repertoire of literature, we witness the two important elements of literature and modernity in the nineteenth century—the growth of history-writing as a discipline and the rise of the expressive modern individual. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe*, there was a sudden flourishing in this period of the four basic genres that help express the modern self: the novel, the biography, the autobiography, and history (34). Through these genres, the modern Indian sought to come

²⁸ Nathan Brown, *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and Other Labors of Nathan Brown*. Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers Publishers, 1890.

²⁹ Milton S. Sangma, *The History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India (Volume-Two)*, Mittal Publications, 1992.

³⁰ Edmund F. Merriam, *History of American Baptist Mission*, American Baptist Publication Society, 1913. He writes that in 1836, a committee appointed by the Board of Managers of the American Bible Society resolved “to adopt all prudent measures to give to the heathen the pure word of God in their own languages, and to furnish their missionaries with all the means in their power to make the translations as exact a representation of the mind of the Holy Spirit as may be possible” (48).

to terms with the growing pressures of individualism and the requirement of becoming a citizen of a modern state.

The study of missionary writing and colonial modernity brings us to the study of literary genres as essential in understanding the history of the North-East. The missionaries chose certain genres to capture the modern individual who is both a private and public entity. The journals, diaries and letters by the missionaries lay bare their innermost feelings, opinions and fears about their role in the world and at the same time began to serve as the knowledge base for understanding North-eastern history. History-writing and Colonisation went hand in hand with the former giving validity to the latter. Through the various modes of writing, the missionaries produced discourses which helped to shape metropolitan public opinion about colonized natives. Anna Johnston's *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800 to 1860* offers close readings of Indian, Polynesian and Australian mission archives to show how evangelicals, colonists and natives were mutually imbricated in specific localized ways (16).³¹ She studies the deep connection between the tasks of writing and building an empire. She argues that missionary texts are important to our understanding of nineteenth-century colonial cultural constructions. In the act of writing and publishing their experiences, missionary writers not only recorded the intermingling of various cultures but also profoundly changed the way cultures were represented. The soldiers of Christ portrayed non-European societies as abysmal in their treatment of women, and represented the allegedly deplorable plight of women in non-European societies as the justification for their colonization by European powers. The destitute native woman, highlighted by the missionary narrative, became the symbol through which colonial expeditions found means to integrate the political and social conquests. The Christian missions could set up their institutions in far-flung areas mainly by publicizing the racial and

³¹ Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire: 1800-1860*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2006.

cultural superiority of the missionary workers. Johnston writes that the missionary agents were well-aware of the complications of their positions and the missionary literature display enough evidence of the dilemma of being the victim and the savior: “Missionary narratives often display ruptures in apparently seamless colonialist textual practices; they worry at potentially inappropriate mimicry by native ‘heathens’ and Christians; and they expose the instability of the missionary position on the colonial stage — an instability measured by its distance from both institutional imperial authority and from native cultures” (9).

Thus, missionary narrative seemed to serve two primary purposes. On the one hand, it validated the presence of white imperialists in the colonized regions by providing a justification for imperialism. It underscored the positive transformations wrought in the colonized society through imperialism. On the other hand, it exposed the cracks in its own colonial narrative. Missionary narratives thus become a rich source to reconstruct the complex processes of cultural change in colonized societies.

In the North-East, soon after the establishment of the first mission, the pioneer Nathan Brown started to publish translated copies of the Bible in Assamese. Translations in other languages such as Garo and Mizo followed as the mission work spread across the hills. A majority of the histories, memoirs and biographies were, however, printed in America where it could easily be distributed among the patrons. As Frederick Downs puts it, none of the books were written for the Indian public but were for the consumption of the English population in Britain and America that would support and aid the missionary endeavours.³² The most prominent feature of missionary literature of the nineteenth century was that it consisted of a

³² In a chapter titled “Historiographical Issues in the Study of Christianity in North-East India,” in *Essays on Christianity in North-East India*, FS Downs writes that the church histories were written to encourage “the supporters of missionary work in the West...to demonstrate how great the need for missionary work was in India...” (14).

mix of historical books, fiction, non-fiction, and other non-literary works such as pamphlets and photographs. The American Baptist Society published the history of the mission from its inception to the present, journals of its members, memoirs of seasoned missionary workers and at the same time also brought out short stories, novels and poems.

This development of the genre was reflective of the expansion of the reading public as well as the growing desire for such books. Critics such as Ian Watt have noted that the nineteenth century was a time when capitalism or changes in the economy of the nation created conditions for a change in the literary forms too.³³ As a result, there was a new focus on “individuality” where writers narrated the story from the point of view of the single protagonist. One example was the novel *Robinson Crusoe* where the hero had complete agency over the narrative and narration. The publication of the novel provided readers “for the first time in the history of fiction with a hero whose day-by-day mental and moral life is fully shared by the reader” (74). The novel captured the essence of the newly-emergent middle-class and the development of the modern man and woman who were individuals in their own right instead of being copies from fables and myths. The journals and memoirs by the missionaries reflected this very engagement with individuality in which they poured out their thoughts and desires on paper.³⁴

Many of the post-colonial writers on the North-East have harked back to missionary literature to find the relationship between Christianity and change. They have browsed through multiple genres in the quest to identify the clues that highlight the core of the enterprise, be it the use of representation, misrepresentation, binaries, history or individual tales of valour and

³³ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, University of California Press, 1957.

³⁴ I shall be engaging in more detail with the themes of fiction, non-fiction and history-writing in the next chapter of the dissertation.

strength. The questions that arise are: what are the genres that permeate through missionary literature and lend them this value? More importantly, how should we study the genre of missionary literature? To seek answers, I refer to Alastair Fowler's *Kinds of Literature*, where he writes that "genre" broadly includes within its ambit the "kind", the "mode", and the "subgenre". Taken together these elements constitute what he calls the "generic repertoire."³⁵ Fowler uses the term "kind" to refer to "historical genre" or a "fixed genre", and informs, "there is a substantial basis of agreement about many historical kinds" (56). In plain terms, "historical kind" may be understood as a broad category of literary composition such as a drama or a novel. There is, by and large, a broad critical consensus as to what counts as a drama or a novel. Representative texts belonging to a "historical kind" reveal certain markers of resemblance, certain common features. Such common features usually concern, Fowler argues, the "representational aspect", "external structure", "size", "scale" "subject" "values" "mood" "occasion" "attitude" "style" "hermeneutic task" of a representative text (60-72). Representational aspects refer to whether the text is a narrative, a dramatic or a discursive. The external structure is "the linear sequence of parts" like the placement of the stanzas or the chapters in a novel (60). According to Fowler, the "size" of a text can be small, medium, and long and can be used to distinguish between different kinds of literature. For example, an elegy can be differentiated from an epigram by its length. Scale serves as a "sensitive generic indicator" (64). The next feature is that of the "subject" of the text that can be mutated from one genre to another. For example, while the tragedy of classical texts had kings and mythical heroes as its subject, modernist writers gave a similar treatment to ordinary people. "Values" are "inherent in all kinds" (66). They highlight the moral world of the texts. A proverb would "impart a relatively unformulated wisdom" and texts such as *Paradise Lost* by John Milton

³⁵ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, Oxford Univ Press, Oxford 1982.

would provide a crossover of “the rank-ordered virtues of classical and of Christian epic” (66). “Mood” is an abstraction that is often used to indicate the tone of the story especially in gothic romance where it “colors character, atmosphere, and natural description in an unmistakable way” (67). “Occasion” and “attitude” refers to a particular event around which the literature revolves. For example, traditionally an epithalamium would be associated with marriage just as an epicede would mark a funeral.

In contrast to historical kinds, Fowler argues, “modes have always an incomplete repertoire, a selection only of the corresponding kind’s features, and one from which overall external structure is absent” (107). In plain terms, a mode refers to the distinction between the following expressions: “comedy” and “comic”. As a mode, “comic” does not include all the common features found in the historical kind called “comedy”. The former also does not have the external structure that is present in the latter. Fowler argues that “modal extension can be either local or comprehensive” (107). Local modulation, on the one hand, refers to “fugitive admixtures” “tinges of generic color” (107). In plain terms, it means, for instance, the fleeting presence of comic relief in a tragedy. Local modulation, Fowler argues, announces itself through a wide variety of signals, namely, “characteristic motif”, “formula”, “rhetorical proportion or quality” (107). Comprehensive modulation, on the other hand, refers to a literary situation where one mode “may pervade much or all of the work” (107). Of crucial importance to my thesis will be the case that Fowler makes for a non-literary “kind” generating literary modes. He writes: “Of the longer kinds, many have had corresponding modes, such as epic (heroic), tragic, comic, historical, romance, biographical, and picaresque. And some non-literary—or no longer literary—kinds are usually recognized as having generated literary modes (topographical; mythological; apocalyptic)” (108). Studying the missionary genre therefore requires an inquiry into what Alastair Fowler would call the “internal structure” of

the texts where resemblances are in “abstraction” and not solely external such as the novels or drama.

Once we position missionary literature within the study of modes, we begin to make a more comprehensive literary analysis of the texts. For example, the second chapter of this thesis, “The Manufacture of Desire”, looks at three different genre affiliations in the form of a historical book, a memoir, and a journal, but the internal structure or characteristics bear a commonality of a study of people and their customs. Thus “mode” at this junction would look at both the literary and the non-literary in terms of an “ethnographic” similitude.

However, as Fowler puts it, such is the evolution of literature that despite the intense desire to categorize, “it is an expectation without any sufficient basis.... Necessary elements are sparse” (39). The idea of what constitutes a tragedy, a comedy or a romance is subject to a wide range of variables that do not fit a tailor-made understanding of that specific genre. In fact, Fowler asserts that it becomes more and more difficult to fit texts within the compartments of genre in the modern times: it needs more time and wider acceptance before a text can find a genre.

Nevertheless, genre-analysis remains an important element of literary criticism as it helps readers and critics to better understand a text. It aids textual interpretation and analysis through comparison and reference. According to Fowler, a text exists as a remnant of the genre that defines it and adds something new to modulate and evolve that particular genre. Comparison and reference of texts within a genre can therefore be seen as a way of recognizing the ways in which a new text resembles the one preceding and yet “changes the genres it relates to.” (23) Keeping in mind that genres are ever evolving and that readers should read texts of a particular genre as a “family” where they are related to each other while at the same time retaining their particular differences, genre-analysis when applied to different literary corpuses

can help in interpreting them better by focusing on the shifts in structure, tone, style and composition.

The primary sources chosen for the study on missionary writings belong to the genre known as ‘narrative’. A majority of them will further affiliate themselves to the kind known as ‘memoir’. The thesis identifies three major ‘literary modes’ at work in this vast corpus of narratives. These modes are ‘historical’, ‘ethnographic’, and ‘geographical’. It will argue that, to a greater or lesser extent, these modes are at work in almost all the primary narratives. It is important to add that some modes dominate a narrative more than the others. By studying modes, I wish to examine the development of the missionary genre from the nineteenth to the twentieth century and the way they incorporate the generic “repertoire” in their writings.

1.9 Research methodology and theoretical framework

As part of post-colonial studies, I have analyzed my primary texts under three rubrics—namely textual analysis, “reading against the grain” popularised by Ranajit Guha, and transnationalism or global history. These research methods have ensured that missionary literature can be studied in terms of its symbolism, genre, and can also be placed in a global context as opposed to a more myopic setting.

Catherine Belsey in “Textual Analysis as a Research Method” highlights how this research method is an essential component of any “discipline that focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts” (60).³⁶ Textual analysis helps in interpreting the text by examining the language, pattern, and tonality. Citing the example of a painting titled *Tarquin and Lucretia*, Catherine underlines the way a text can be interpreted by addressing some concerns about it: “Where are its sympathies? What historical differences

³⁶ Gabriele Griffin Ed, *Research Methods for English Studies*, Edinburg Univ Press, Second Edition, 2013.

does it present? Are there any surprises?” (173). In other words, it starts by identifying a problem and then working towards its assessment.

Meanwhile, the transnational method helps post-colonial studies deal with the movement of concepts across national boundaries in the wake of globalization. In *The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Paul Jay highlights how dealing with concepts in the global context provides a study in contrast and adds many layers of meaning.³⁷ He gives the example of the Foucauldian concept of “sexuality” to clarify his stand on the issue. According to Paul, sexuality exists in every culture but it defies a singular definition because it has been “manufactured” historically through a body of discourse surrounding its understanding and application. Historically, concepts have moved from place to place with the movement of people and universal notions have been created and modified over the course of time. For instance, homosexuality and heterosexuality both come under the radar of sexuality but have been constructed differently through a “historically embedded” body of discourse surrounding their manufacture. Paul suggests that concepts do not exist in a vacuum but are constantly undergoing changes based on location and worldviews. Transnationalism assists in the movement, transfer and reassessment of concepts and when exposed to different cultures, survives on the notion of “difference” rather than “sameness”. Paul further adds that post-colonial scholars study these differences to understand universal concepts that undergo local variations. Apart from sexuality, literature, race, gender and many other concepts therefore do not exist on their own but are “defined and regulated by discursive regimes based on difference that operate ideologically and through institutions to both enable and restrict certain forms of agency” (19). In recent times, there has been much emphasis on the study of colonialism under the prism of transnationalism and global history. Other than Paul Jay, Sebastian Conrad in

³⁷ Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Cornell University Press, 2010.

What is Global History? sheds light on the way the method elicits the “connectivities of the past” (6) and helps in discovering new stories from the existing archives.³⁸ Conrad also points out that “global” must not be taken literally to mean the whole world. Instead, it serves as a symbol of connectivity between different places even within a smaller frame.

In the present thesis, each of the three primary categories the dissertation focuses on—history, population, and territory—were European ideologies developed during the long period of Enlightenment. These were ushered in the colony through the colonial state and the evangelical pastorate. In the process of transplantation, the ideologies themselves underwent historical transformations. The transnational critical framework will enable me to trace the processes of circulations and transformations in the subcontinent.

The transnational critical framework helps enable a mode of analysis that not just confines itself to the identification of the similarity in the developments of the concept across time and place but also takes cognizance of the local variation. It pays attention to the “difference”. One way of identifying this difference is to scrutinize texts for the presence of the native voices that question the narrative of the missionaries. However, the problem is that such voices are few and far between—a historical and textual irony considering the fact that the missionary enterprise was dependent on the local men and women for its existence and proliferation.

As Jeffrey Cox points out in *The Imperial Fault Lines*, the weight of spreading Christianity was shouldered, to a large extent, by the native converts and catechists.³⁹ Cox takes up the case study of Punjab, and argues that the colonial missionaries to the area could set up

³⁸ Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?*, Princeton Univ Press, 2016.

³⁹ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940*, Stanford UP, 2002.

their institutions and networks only through the cooperation of twice as many natives as the American and European population. Cox further states that the common perception of white men and women struggling heroically in an antagonistic field is an established discursive motif because of the absence of ‘counter voices’ in the missionary narratives. While the contribution of the locals was instrumental in establishing the missions, their representation in the missionary accounts remained “marginalized.” Local men and women remained nameless entities whose role in the narratives were relegated to the periphery. They found only a few mentions or passing references to serve the interest of the white writers. In order to access the voices of the Indians who stay anonymous in the accounts, Cox urges “constant attention to the multiple levels of exclusions in the narratives, including the narratives constituted by statistics” (5).

My research methodology would, therefore, require, what Ranajit Guha calls, “reading against the grain” through which the meaning of a text can be found in all the unlikely places.⁴⁰ In his work, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Guha draws attention to the manner in which official documents glossed over the complexities of peasant revolts in India and represented such acts as “spontaneous and unorganized” (6).⁴¹ Writing the Foreword to the text, James C. Scott commends the critical enquiry carried out by Guha who “read the official sources ‘against the grain’” to expose codes through which the officials interpreted the revolts to suit their own narratives leaving aside the intention and fervor of the subaltern groups (xii). Guha urges researchers to re-read colonial narratives in order to find the cracks in the authorial intention with which they were written.

⁴⁰ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak. Oxford Univ Press, 2011.

⁴¹ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Oxford UP, 1986.

The narratives by Christian missionaries in Punjab or in the North-East exhibit a similarity of dismissive attitudes towards the locals and deny them a prominent presence in their pages. Whether it is short bureaucratic accounts of tribal dissent or autobiographies featuring many decades of work, the local characters play miniscule roles. Therefore, an attempt needs to be made to read between the lines for voices that are counter to the current understanding of these texts. One way of doing so is to study the statistics of missionary efforts, as suggested by Cox and identify the “codes” through which interpretation is done. The other way would be to closely read the patterns of interaction between the white missionaries and natives where the texts do include a few observations from the natives. This usually occurs in the form of questions, articulation of doubts, expression of fear and requests for help. In studying the evangelical narratives’ association with the concept of governance, territory and gender, I will attempt to unravel the imperialistic codes in my primary texts.

1.10 Chapter layout

The thesis is divided into four core chapters. The first chapter analyzes “history”, the second analyzes “ethnography”, the third “population”, and the fourth “territory”. These discourses are essential in understanding the “outer” and “inner” sanctum of North-East’s politics and culture as both are interlinked through certain forms of shared power. In doing so, I have looked at the ways in which the genre of the written works aid the enterprise in empowering their views on the area.

The first chapter “**Between Fact and Fiction: The Concept of Reality in Missionary Historical Narratives,**” delves into the process of history writing that began as an act of religious difference. The missionaries wrote many metropolitan histories to justify their presence in the colonized parts of the world. In this chapter I refer to some of these histories written by missionary women and how they sought to fit the people into binaries of civilized

and uncivilized. The American Baptist missionary enterprise and ‘historiography’ of the North East were closely tied to each other as written history on the area began with their arrival.

The second chapter “**The Manufacture of Desire: Ethnographic realism and the making of the North-East,**” studies the nature of the ethnographic writing that constructed native cultures as units that could be dismantled and rebuilt through the cultivation of new desires. Missionary ethnography hinged on the idea that a careful conditioning of the impulses surrounding ‘desire’ could ensure that education, cleanliness and scientific outlook appear to be viable alternatives to the indigenous ‘heathen’ culture. Colonial forces, in this case the missionaries, became conduits for the normalization of Christian values that would ultimately manifest itself in the behavioral pattern of the newly converted ‘civilized’ natives. It built a discourse that fixated itself with two symbols of local destitution—violence and superstition—to make its point.

The third “**The Christian Pastorate and the Birth of a Population**” is on the evolution of “population” as an emblem of modernity. In Europe the concept of modern population emerged during the eighteenth-century, and it redefined the relationship between individual subjects and the state. Here, I particularly rely on the theoretical works of Michel Foucault who argued that modern governance increasingly began to take shape through the creation of a modern population. In his work *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault elaborates on the genealogy of population and argues that modern governance began with the act of developing the mechanisms of managing individuals in their collective formations.[43] In other words, the state began to exist by way of managing the populace. Foucault declares “individual desire” as the driving force that goes on to form a “collective desire” of the population. This chapter looks at how this aspect of the creation and maintenance of desire

among the natives for education and Christian lifestyle is highlighted in the ethnographic narratives of the missionaries.

The fourth chapter “**Imagining a Geography and Realizing a Territory**” takes up “territory” as a nineteenth century development in the North-East. North-Eastern provinces earlier had fluid boundaries as the natives practiced shifting cultivation and constantly moved from one hill to another. The American missionaries established permanence in tribal areas by redefining spaces as more rigid and fixed. They introduced new structures—churches, mission stations, and schools—that they pitted against the local spaces ascribed with the characteristics of barbarism, filth, superstition, and ignorance.

The chapter highlights the “spatial turn” in literature in which theorists and writers increasingly began to try and understand the nature of societies by studying the physical area where interactions between people and practices take place. To that extent, geography is imagined through the subjectivity of the narratives. The fact that the plains of Assam are imagined to be the imperial tea-gardens, and the hills are ascribed with qualities of danger and chaos is a narrative function of missionary literature. In contrast to geography, territories are fixed, tangible, and require state forces for implementation. This chapter examines the way spaces were ascribed with personalities in the missionary narratives so that the North-East appears to be a study in contrast to the civilized West. Territory is important to this understanding because any people that lacked fixed territory were also seen as bereft of a civil society.

Chapter 1

Between Fact and Fiction: The Concept of Reality in Missionary Historical Narratives

2.1 Enquiry into North-East's 'history'

This chapter studies a set of 'histories' produced by the American Baptist missionaries about the North-East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It analyzes the role such 'histories' played in constructing North-East as an epistemological field of historical enquiry. In particular, the chapter examines the narrative strategy employed by the historians. In the process, it makes the following arguments. First, evangelical project of modernity rests on the construction of a theological and political binary of civilized and savage. Mission historiography seeks to fit the people of North-East into the binary framework. Second, the historians employ plots that help to narrate a fundamental transformation of the local people from savagery into Christian civility. In the process, the narrative sets up American missionaries as the exemplars of Christian civility towards which the local convert needs to evolve in course of time. The passage of time is then presented as a progress and transformation towards civility. And third, evangelical histories rely on narrative details to create a reality-effect which passes for evidence. In other words, the narrative density creates the historical truths the mission seeks to construct.

2.2 Production of history: creating archive and constructing narratives

The Baptist histories of the North-East were written on two interrelated registers. On the one hand, Baptist missionaries stationed in the colony produced a voluminous collection of letters, poems, diaries, essays, journal entries, annual reports, memoirs, and autobiographies. The missionary writers narrated their lived experiences in the colonies through these forms. On the other hand, Baptist American historians living in the metropolis wrote histories based on these archives. The metropolitan histories were of a global scope. They included chapters on

all the regions of the world where the American Baptists had established stations. In this global scheme, the North-East occupied a significant position because it was deemed to be a particularly fruitful field.

Aside from the contributions of the American Baptist writers, the historical archive on the North-East consists of survey reports by British officials. Some of these were written before the arrival of the Baptist mission to the area. The major difference between the bureaucratic history and the missionary history was that the former attempted to highlight the importance of Assam and its neighbouring areas as a newly discovered mine of untapped natural resources. In particular, the British officials encouraged the clearing of forests in Assam to replace them with tea plantations, converting the princely state into an “imperial tea garden”.⁴² Missionary history on the other hand focused on the human resources and how the people of the area can become a valuable addition to the ever expanding kingdom of God. The following sections will furnish short accounts of the formation of bureaucratic and evangelical archives on the North-East.

2.2.1 Constructing bureaucratic history

One of the earliest histories of the North-East was compiled by Dr. J.P.Wade, a Medical Officer who visited Assam in 1792. He collected historical information about the place and published his papers and correspondence under two titles—*An Account of Assam* (1800) and *A Geographical Sketch of Assam* (1805).⁴³ His work chiefly consisted of the history of the kings who had previously ruled over the valley. Some decades later when the British officially

⁴² Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India*, Duke University Press, 2011.

⁴³ Tamo Mibang, *Tribal Studies: Emerging Frontiers of Knowledge*, Mittal Publications, 2007, Page: 97.

occupied Assam in 1826 (with the treaty of Yandaboo), several surveys were carried out which led to the publication of official economic and social histories of the place.⁴⁴

2.2.2 Production of evangelical history

Alongside the British officials, the missionary enterprise had begun its own parallel system of collection and publication on Assam's history. A decade after their arrival in January 1846, the mission established its printing press and began to publish the first local magazine called *Orunodoi*. It was edited in succession by Nathan Brown, A.H. Danforth, S.M. Whiting, Miles Bronson, William Ward, E.H. Clark, Mrs Ward and A. K. Gurney. In the early stage, there was a preoccupation with antiquarianism. The missionary periodical the *Orunodoi* wrote not only about religion and science but also about the old history of Assam. The issues from the month of August 1850 to August 1852 serialized a chronicle of medieval Assam entitled *Purani Asom Buranji*. The *buranji* started with the description of the origin of the Ahom kings and ended with the reign of Jay Dhvaj Singha (1566 saka).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Dr. F. B. Hamilton, a Scottish physician, conducted a survey of Eastern India between 1807 to 1814 at the behest of the East India Company (The survey was published under the title *An Account of Assam* by the Government of Assam in 1940). Captain Francis Jenkins, the Commissioner at Assam, undertook a survey of Assam and Cachar in 1832 and forwarded the reports to the Government of Bengal (In 1995, historian H.K. Barpujari published it under the title *Francis Jenkins Report on the North East*). Captain Robert Boileau Pemberton published *The Report on The Eastern Frontier of British India* in 1835 after conducting a survey of Assam, Manipur, Arracan, Kingdom of Pong, Ava and a few other places in Burma. In 1841, William Robinson published *A Descriptive Account of Assam* that followed the trend established by his predecessors and dealt mostly with the economic viability of the area and narrated the history of the kings who had ruled over them. Other historical books of the century include John M'Cosh's *Topography of Assam* (1837) and W. W. Hunter's *A Statistical Account of Assam* (1879). In 1884 Alexander Mackenzie published *The History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*. Almost immediately after, Sir Edward Gait undertook a historical research of Assam and published *A History of Assam* in 1905. The book is considered to be one of the best works on the area.

⁴⁵ Munin Saikia, "Historical Writings on North-East India and the American Baptist Missionaries," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 72, 2011, pp. 906–912., www.jstor.org/stable/44146781.

More crucially to my project, this preoccupation with the local history manifests itself in the Jubilee Conference organized by the mission to commemorate the completion of fifty years of its work in the North-East in 1886. It prompted the missionaries to produce a series of local histories about their stations and the communities they were working with. The preface to the conference proceedings, published in 1887, says: “It was felt that, at the end of this fiftieth year of our Assam Mission work, all the workers ought to meet, review the past, compare notes on the present, and lay plans for the future. As we did this we felt ourselves benefited, and conceived it desirable to preserve and make accessible the historical matter presented, and to acquaint others with the work here. So we determined to publish the papers presented, together with a brief of the accompanying discussions”.⁴⁶ The *Assam Mission* produced short narrative histories of various mission stations in the region. These include Mrs. A. K. Gurney’s “Historical Sketch of the Sibsagar Church and Mission, (20-30)” Rev P. H. Moore’s “Historical Sketch of the Nowgong Mission, (31-40)” Rev. E. G. Phillips’ “Historical Sketch of the Garo Mission, (54-79)” Rev. S. W. Rivenburg’s “Historical Sketch of the Ao Naga Mission, (80-87)” and Mrs. W.E. Witter’s “Historical Sketch of the Lotha Naga Mission. (88-95)”.⁴⁷ In historical sketches such as these, the missionaries tried, to record the historical evolution of the peoples of the hills and the plains from a state of barbarity to civilization. In producing copious ‘sketches’ about the historical progress of the tribes and their own efforts in spreading the Gospel, the missionaries sought to narrate a “real” story of humanity with all its challenges.⁴⁸

In addition to the historical sketches, the missionaries also produced narratives about the ‘local’ histories. It is in this context that I engage with three ‘metropolitan’ historical

⁴⁶ Please see the Preface to *Assam Mission*

⁴⁷ These papers were presented on 20. 12. 1886, 21.12.1886, 22.12.1886, 24.12.1886, and 24.12.1886 respectively

⁴⁸ *Assam Mission: Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference, Held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission, 1887

narratives produced by the American Baptist Mission to the North East: Ada C. Chaplin's *Our Gold Mine: The Story of American Baptist Missions in India* (1879), Sophie Bronson Titterington's *A Century of Baptist Foreign Missions: An Outline Sketch* (1891), and Helen Montgomery's *Following the Sunrise: A Century of Baptist Missions, 1813-1913* (1913).

While all three primary texts in this chapter engage with the history of the Baptist Mission, the generic affiliations are distinct. Chaplin's *Our Gold Mine* is narrated in the form of a children's story involving an American family that discusses the Baptist Mission in their parlour. In other words, it is a story within a story. In the preface, the writer notes that the book is suitable for bible classes: "To the members of my own Bible class and of other Bible classes—I have written this book for you...whom, I think, feel some interest in the great conflict waging between the kingdoms of good and evil for the possession of our world" (Preface). The story teller in the book is a fictional Mrs. Bancroft, a mother, who instills a sense of missionary purpose into the minds of the adolescent children of the house as well as the neighbourhood. Mrs. Bancroft sits down with the children in the evening to narrate to them the history and the purpose of the missionary enterprise. In her stories she talks about Assam Mission, its establishments, and its achievements.

Titterington's *A Century of Baptist Foreign Missions: An Outline Sketch* is written in the form of a textbook that can be taught in schools as part of Bible classes. In order to awaken further interest among the readers, at the end of every chapter, the book contains a set of questions as well as a list of suggested readings. History has a self-conscious pedagogic aspect to it and the metropolitan American histories incorporate the local material as a source of this history.

Montgomery's *Following the Sunrise: A Century of Baptist Missions, 1813-1913* is written for the general readers that the mission hopes to impress with its work. It starts with the

history of the Baptist Mission in England and undertakes the study of its development in Burma, Assam, India, China, Congo, and Philippines. The book ends with an appeal for donations, a plea for increase in the number of workers to foreign lands and a call for prayers. She writes, “The kingdom might come bravely marching over the mountains tomorrow, if the full tithe were poured into the treasury of the Church” (283). Such histories served to propagate the idea of the mission enterprise as a sacrificial endeavor that required the support of other Christians for its success.

Chaplin’s *Our Gold Mine* navigates the zone between fiction and history where the tales of “real” Christian bravery is narrated by fictional characters. Unlike the other two books on the history of Baptist Missions, which do not give any space to the history of the places before the arrival of the missionaries, *Our Gold Mine* tries to explore the ancient forms of Hinduism and Brahmanism and seeks to understand why Christianity could provide a new way forward.

2.2.3 Construction of narrative framework: local and global

All three metropolitan histories alongside *Assam Mission* are written as a narrative where information about the colonized places and the missionary enterprise are presented in the form of a story. The books are neatly divided into chapters dedicated to mission histories of different countries and locations in a chronological sequence.

Unlike the histories written by the British bureaucrats who focused on the place under the moniker such as “Eastern Frontier”, “North-East,” and “Assam,” the histories by the missionaries were divided into local and global. While the mission workers in India wrote local histories, those on the outside embedded the place within the larger narrative of Christian achievements. *Our Gold Mine: The Story of American Baptist Missions in India*, *A Century of Baptist Foreign Missions: An Outline Sketch*, and *Following the Sunrise: A Century of Baptist*

Missions, 1813-1913 undertake the project to historicize the missions located all over the colonized world rather than the mission stations. The task of writing the individual history of the places is sourced to the missionaries whose lived experiences provided the raw material for the above-mentioned Baptist writers.

2.3 Towards a colonial project

The keen interest in writing down the history of the North-East, both by the missionaries and the bureaucrats, reflected a pre-occupation with the tradition of historicism. This pre-occupation was earlier seen in the context of Bengal in the eighteenth Century. Ranajit Guha studies how Bengal became a subject of an elaborate historical study after the British took up the Diwani system following the Battle of Plassey (1757).⁴⁹ On establishing political control, the British administration realized that it was only by studying the Indian past that they could understand the land revenue systems operational in the area and further their mercenary interests. This quest to explore the economic system led to the emergence of three kinds of histories—political, economic, and local, as an attempt to make sense of the systems that the British would now have to work with.

Post-colonial critics have found much correlation between the colonial enterprise and the act of history-writing. Apart from the mercenary motives, Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee in their analyses of colonialism have drawn attention to the manner in which the past became the ground on which British imperialism built its foundation in India.⁵⁰ By probing into the history of the colonized regions and peoples, and representing its culture as a deplorable and exploitative system, the imperial powers justified the need to bring in European modernity

⁴⁹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, 1997.

⁵⁰ Please see Ranajit Guha's *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, 1997, Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1993, and *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: a Derivative Discourse*. Zed, 1993.

as a desirable replacement. While Guha focuses on the early British emphasis on the economic history of India, Chatterjee writes about the British appropriation of the social and political history that showed the native's inability to self-rule without colonial intervention. According to Chatterjee, Europe imposed its history as the model on which all other societies must build themselves. Only after being modern enough could the latter be considered capable to govern themselves. Thus, Europe which saw its own history as divided between "pre-scientific and scientific, (16)"⁵¹ put every other society to test on similar lines, and decided that the colonized peoples were not scientific enough to shoulder the responsibility of being a modern state. It projected itself as "the Great Event...which terminated centuries of despotism, superstition and vegetative life and ushered in a new era of change of 'destruction' as well as 'regeneration', destruction of antiquated tradition and the emergence of modern, secular and national forces" (23).

This project to 'historicize' the land and its people so as to justify their colonization and adoption of Western forms of enlightenment is one of the processes that bind the official British imperial power and the missionary enterprise. The missionary enterprise, too, produced histories of the missions and the non-Christian regions of the world in an attempt to justify the process of evangelization. Both branches of narratives converged when it came to the vilification of the people in the colonies. Much like how the British created a negative representation of the population in Bengal, the missionaries in the North-East too described the residents of the area as "cruel," "incorrigible," and "blood-thirsty savages".⁵² It is no coincidence that both projects used the widely popular eighteenth and nineteenth century form

⁵¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World a Derivative Discourse*, Zed, 1993

⁵² Missionary history is filled with derogatory references to the colonized population. In *Following the Sunrise*, Montgomery describes the Garo tribesmen as "true savages, wild, brave and, cruel, afraid only of the evil spirits by whom they believed the mountains to be peopled" (78).

of narrative history to generate and circulate the “facts” about the places they governed. This chapter is an attempt to analyze how the missionaries represented themselves as well as the locals which led to the formation of enduring discursive patterns about both the evangelical project itself and the North-East.

2.3.1 Towards a missionary narrative

At the beginning of colonial enterprise, religious leaders in England felt that missionaries needed to produce their own version of colonial history instead of relying on the bureaucratic reports and travelogues. In her study of nineteenth century Christian thought, Anna Johnston writes that up until the arrival of the missionaries, the history books had allegedly romanticized the local civilization as “elegant,” “wise” or “venerable” thereby misleading the reading public about the “revolting reality” of heathen societies.⁵³ It is this alleged romanticization of the natives that the evangelicals set out to correct. Johnston cites an incident from 1834 in which missionary, Reverend Robert Burns, a leading English Presbyterian minister, claimed in front of the London Missionary Society, that following the visits by missionaries, “More accurate accounts of its (the population in the colonies) real condition have been obtained” (1). There are two observations I wish to make about the above statement. Firstly, the missionary enterprise seemed to consider its members a team of narrative-historians who could give a more truthful representation of the events and people they encountered. And secondly, it believed or at least openly declared that it could perceive what was real and what was but a romanticization of the truth. The evangelical project of historiography was thus keen to make a case for its authenticity and reliability before a metropolitan audience.

⁵³ Please see the Introduction to Anna Johnston’s *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800-1860*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Among the American missionaries, too, it was essential to contribute to the missionary historical archive. In a paper titled “Methods of Mission Work,” at the Jubilee Celebrations, Rev. M. C. Mason tells the delegates, “We are each obliged to attend to various departments. Translating, writing, publishing, printing, theological teaching, management of schools, preaching, touring, and a host of minor duties, all fall upon the same missionary” (109).⁵⁴ Rev. Mason’s call to create a body of literature highlights how the missionary enterprise thrives on the back of a well-established network of writers, readers, donors, and publishers. Much of the missionary work had to do with creating, preserving, and disseminating documents. It is not incorrect to say that they were part of a social network that relied on a number of nodal points. The entire network was active to create evangelical history.

2.3.2 Creation of binaries

The missionary enterprise did not distinguish between the task of evangelism and that of civilizing the “savages”. They believed that proselytization was insufficient in the absence of cultural transformation among the heathen. According to historians Sajal Nag and M. Satish Kumar, “Christianity in North East India attempted to modernize heathenism to Christianity and at the same time transform the ‘noble savages’ — tribes to Englishmen”.⁵⁵ To that end, the ‘histories’ created two sets of binaries. First, between the white missionary and the multitude of local heathens who were supposedly steeped in ignorance, superstitions, and bad habits. The second, once conversions had begun, between the transformed heathens and the “savages” who are yet to come under the fold of Christian civility. Missionary P. H. Moore demonstrates a missionary’s fondness for binary thinking in his descriptions of the natives: “Born in heathenism and brought up in poisonous atmosphere—those who in their earliest childhood

⁵⁴ *Assam Mission*, 1886.

⁵⁵ Sajal Nag, M. Satish Kumar, “Noble Savage to Gentlemen: Discourses of Civilisation and Missionary Modernity in North East India”, *Contemporary India: a North-East Special*, Vol. 1 No. 4, 2002.

were taught by their own parents' lips all forms of lying and deceit and filthy communication—slander, backbiting and reviling abuse. Their meagre stock of information was drawn from the vile stories of viler gods whom they were taught to bow down to and worship” (159).⁵⁶ In these lines, P. H. Moore attacks many aspects of the lives of the people they had come to work among—their flawed familial system, their evil form of worship, and their lack of integrity as a people—all of which stood in sharp contrast to the missionary man's own heroism and strength of character. Such descriptions were condoned by a majority of the missionary men and women writers who saw their own loving relationship with their families and neighbours as evidence of a civilized life.

But whereas there were strict demarcations between white missionaries and brown converts, this belief in the absolute binary of human conduct, stood on perilous grounds as it could not always account for cases that did not adhere to the ‘civilized versus heathen’ debate. The missionary enterprise routinely dealt with native converts who would revert back to their old “heathen” habits of smoking and drinking forgoing the preaching and frequent warnings from the missionaries. Rev. E. G. Philips while describing the converted Garos of Meghalaya wrote, “One of the worst obstacles, more stubborn than demon-worship by far, is intemperance in the use of intoxicating drink. It is the right hand and right eye that must be parted with before entering the kingdom. It is also the stumbling-block over which many a convert has fallen away from Christ. It is an enemy we have to fight to the death” (78).⁵⁷ Many converts would routinely be chided for their dependence on rice beer and their tendency to divorce easily. Others were banned from attending church proceedings until they had overcome their sins.

⁵⁶ P. H. Moore, “Need for a native ministry,” *Assam Mission*, 1886.

⁵⁷ E. G. Philips, “Historical Sketch of the Garo Hills,” *Assam Mission*, 1886.

2.4 A brief theory of Christian historiography

In order to understand the development of narrativity in Christian traditions of historiography, it is necessary to look at the purpose it served. As mentioned earlier, post-colonial critics in India have highlighted how missionary history provided the push necessary to carry out proselytization by elevating Christian civility in sharp contrast to the “savagery” of the local population. As such, the missionaries aimed to replace many native customs with their concept of “civilized” practices and therefore “attacked everything they defined as paganism and pagan tradition: head taking, festivals, celebrations, feasting, rice-beer drinking, opium eating, funerary customs, house building, sexual habits, polygamy, clothing, hair-styles, ornaments, tattooing, habits of deference, legends, and traditional medical practices” (8).⁵⁸ However, this view of missionary agenda while explaining why their historiography derogated local customs does not fully engage with the unique way in which Christians viewed the concept and purpose of history. According to scholars of Christian historiography such as Herbert Butterfield and David Spadafora, history writing stemmed from the twin concepts of ‘providence’ and ‘progress’ that made the process an indispensable part of Christian missions.⁵⁹ As these concepts were integral to the evangelical mission’s self-conception, Christian histories/history writing became integral to the missionary’s work in the colony.

Firstly, for Christian historians, history in any form started with the Biblical event of Creation. In their analyses of Christian histories written during the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth century historiography, Butterfield and Spadafora have pointed out that while there are many versions of Christian historiography, there exists an overarching critical consensus that the world is created by God and all history emerges from the seminal event of Creation.

⁵⁸ Geraldine Forbes, *Good Christians and Bloodthirsty Savages: Samuel Perrine's Presentations of the Nagas*. Guwahati: ICHR, 2016 (pg. 8).

⁵⁹ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1950 and David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* 1990.

The notion of “Providence” rests on the belief that God’s sovereign will directs history and that His intervention can be used to interpret it. Butterfield writes, “In a sense everything with which we deal when we are discussing Christianity and history... must be a commentary on the ways of Providence” (93). He adds that providence-based writing comes from the personal commitment of the historian to Christianity: “I am unable to see how a man can find the hand of God in secular history, unless he has first found that he has an assurance of it in his personal experience. If it is objected that God is revealed in history through Christ, I cannot think that this can be true for the mere external observer, who puts on the thinking-cap of the ordinary historical student. It only becomes effective for those who have carried the narrative to intimate regions inside themselves, where certain of the issues are brought home to human beings” (107). The historian writing as a Christian invests his or her theological trust in the concept of Providence and this shapes the ways in which history is narrated.

The faith in Divine Providence remained so instrumental to Christian history writing that the concept survived the Renaissance when there was a shift towards a more secular temperament. Divine Providence was a medieval category of Christian theology but it continued to thrive alongside scientific advancement. Christian intellectuals in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century Europe began to witness God’s hand in the overall scientific progress taking place during the time. Scientific progress was seen as the will of God at work. In addition, the very act of writing history began to be seen as an act of knowledge creation in the service of God. David Spadafora elaborates that there was a steady evaluation of “intellectual heritage”, mainly the Christian vision of history in eighteenth century England where several religious leaders began to find a correlation between the causal movement of human progress in terms of the development of “knowledge” as a discipline and the divine Christian providence. “Progress” was no longer seen as an anti-thesis to Christianity but a part of religious development. According to this new understanding, Christianity ended the conflict

between divine omnipotence and human agency by embracing the contradictory aspects. In mid-eighteenth century, missionary thinkers began to lend a little more emphasis to human agency. They agreed to “ascribe the improvement of religious knowledge at least partially to human actions than entirely to divine revelation” (90). They also believed that progress would flow from man’s efforts as much as it would from divinity through the spread of knowledge. In other words, God’s divinity began to be viewed as a mystery that unravels itself slowly to men based on the stages of history it has reached. Three Anglican clerics, John Edwards, William Worthington, and Edmund Law, from 1699 to 1745 argued that “God, reveals His truth in stages appropriate to the intellectual conditions of particular times and places”(87). This meant that world was ever-changing and would continue to change and it was all part of God’s larger plan. Spadafora quotes John Ross, “the moderate bishop of Exeter”, who declared that even though a full understanding of the prophecies would probably not be attained “till the great designs of Providence are accomplished, and the mystery of God is finished...still much of the obscurity of prophetic texts could be removed by the ‘frequent and gradual attempts’ of their interpreters” (90).

This important development in Christianity incorporated ‘progress’ as a sign of divine intervention that no longer required the dismissal of secular scientific advancement because ultimately, all progress would culminate in the Kingdom of God. It was understood that God “would allow science to become the means to bring about a new paradise on earth” (110). This idea of progress coincided with the belief that there is a definite second coming and it was up to Christians to prepare for it, serving as human agents who fulfill the demands of divine providence. There “was the expectation of an imminent millennium, which enabled them to provide a useful ideological framework for the religious, political, and sometimes social reforms their proponents desired” (109). Thus, ‘progress’ began to be associated with the propagation of the Christian faith. History-writing became the crucial tool in determining the

stage and pace of ‘progress’ by documenting how divine providence was changing the world towards a Christian future. The social network created by the missionary enterprise worked like a well-oiled machinery to generate and disseminate this information.

2.4.1 Christian historiography in India

Among the missionaries stationed in India, history-writing in the nineteenth century served as a means to generate support from the reading public in England and America. John C. B. Webster in his review of Christian historiography of India writes that the late nineteenth century witnessed several missionary historians try and validate the role of Christian missions by highlighting the merits of Catholic and Protestant presence in the country.⁶⁰ Owing to this, several Christian scholars attempted to woo Western readership under the belief that Western readers ought to evaluate their works in the colonies by viewing them from a historical perspective. In other words, they were keen on being accepted by their fellow citizens.

The idea of progress that had become an integral part of Western consciousness as noted in the previous section was extended to India. The notion of progress, however, was situated in the context of an unequal relationship of the colonizer and the colonized. According to Webster, white superiority ensured that the focus of written history conformed to keeping the status quo intact with missionaries and officials getting to play active agents in these narratives. The natives were seen as too backward to be given a prominent feature and all the actions within the narrative elaborated on the missionaries as people pushing the plot forward. As such, the “modernization of traditional India” became an important theme in these writings as historians saw “Protestant missionaries as agents of modernization” (148). ‘Progress’ was measured in terms of changes brought about among the animists and heathen communities. Written ‘histories’ traced the spread of Christian influence and kept a record of conversions,

⁶⁰ John C.B. Webster, *Historiography of Christianity in India*, Oxford University Press, 2012.

schools, missionary meetings and the utilization of funds. It also provided the platform for understanding the core beliefs of the religion by treating the passage of time as a positive exemplar of the divine providence.

2.5 Reading the prefaces to the histories

Mission historians, much like their secular counterparts, were aware that in order for their works to be taken seriously, the content of their ‘histories’ needed to give an impression of being ‘truthful’. One of the ways in which it was achieved was through the addition of prefaces, footnotes and bibliographies to the ‘histories’ that would make it possible for the readers and scholars to verify the ‘story’ within.

2.5.1 The politics of prefaces

According to Anthony Grafton, the inclusion of ‘appendages’ such as prefaces and footnotes became a standard practice of ‘modern’ history-writing as “they offer the empirical support for stories told and arguments presented. Without them, historical theses can be admired or resented, but they cannot be verified or disapproved” (vii).⁶¹ Grafton adds that it is through the inclusion of footnotes and prefaces that a historian becomes equivalent to a scientist who produces his data through references that can be scrutinized by other scientists. Taken together, prefaces, footnotes, and bibliography provide the seal of authenticity to a historical work by foregrounding evidences in support of the content and by also convincing the reader that the historian has put in an adequate amount of research to his or her findings. It is what separates “historical modernity from tradition” considering that ancient historians such as “Thucydides and Joinville, Eusebius and Matthew Paris did not identify their sources or reflect on their methods in texts parallel to their narratives” (23). Modern writing, however, necessitates a claim to truth that has to be supported by past writers as well as be the guiding

⁶¹ Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Harvard Univ Press, 1997.

hand for scholars who wish to carry on research on the same topic. Furthermore, commenting on the nature of modern prefaces, Grafton writes that it evokes “a Republic of Letters—or at least an academic support group—in which the writer claims membership” (7). It is an astute way of establishing veracity by placing oneself among a group of authors who have earlier worked in the same field.

2.5.2 Emplotment in the nineteenth century missionary prefaces.

The American missionary historians added prefaces, footnotes, bibliography, and a list of suggested readings to their narratives in order to amplify its impact as a serious contender for ‘truth’. For instance, in *Our Gold Mine*, Ada Chaplin writes that the purpose of her work was to “make more real...the part of the battle-ground which lies beyond our immediate vision...” (Preface). The missionary history written on India has several such prefaces where the authors speak directly to the readers to bring the distant evangelical war more alive and closer to them. Missionary prefaces position evangelization as a battle that unfolds beyond the immediate purview of the metropolitan American reader. Battle is a metaphor for the struggles that the missionary enterprise endured in tackling the heathenism of the local populace.

Titterington in *A Century of Foreign Baptist Missions* incorporates an Introduction in which she declares that her ‘history’ is a compilation. She has pieced together information from other historical sources such as the Baptist magazines as well as reports and letters from the missionaries stationed at the colonies. In addition, she has also taken information from “Dr. Tupper’s two royal octavo volumes”.⁶² It is interesting that Titterington refers to the works of Tupper, an anti-slavery proponent, as one of her sources. She establishes a discursive equivalence between the foreign mission in Assam and the domestic institution of slavery.

⁶² Dr. Henry Martin Tupper (1831-1893) was a Baptist minister best known for his work among freed slaves in the American South. He established the Shaw University in North Carolina in 1865, the first such university for African-American youths.

Titterington also adds *Our Gold Mine* by Chaplin to her list of sources. She is validating the worth of her predecessor and creates a tradition of missionary history on foreign fields.

Meanwhile, *Following the Sunrise* by Montgomery has neither a preface nor an introduction but opens with a photograph of an old stone Buddha statue from Burma overrun by snaky roots of a tree. In the absence of a preface, the inclusion of a total of thirty-seven photographic evidences seems to provide the seal of authority. Having been written and published in the twentieth century, the work optimizes the use of photographs to highlight the reliability of her content.

2.6 History and the theories of narrative

In his analysis of the close ties between narrativity and history-writing, Hayden White writes that the historian's quest to establish the "truth" uses "story-telling" as the preferred method to make it feel authentic.⁶³ Indeed, narrativity or "story-telling", in White's opinion, serves as the universal way in which knowledge of events is transferred around the world. In other words, writing history in narrative form served as an extension of the "natural impulse" to convert information into a coherent form of telling while passing it from one culture to another. He adds that narrativity is a "meta code" or "a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (1). He gives three primary reasons for the historian's use of narration.

Firstly, narration as a standard for story-telling became the primary way of giving a "true account of what really happened" or the "discourse of the real" (20). White argues that while histories can be written in other formats too such as annals and chronicles which present events in their raw form, and are therefore "real" in a sense, eighteenth century historians

⁶³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1987.

believed that true events achieved their “fullness” in the narrative form. Narrativity as a technique highlighted the importance of a particular event in its relation with others thereby giving it a continuity that “modern scholars seek”. According to White, it fulfils the “need or impulse to rank events with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history that makes a narrative representation of real events possible” (10). This holds true for the Baptist historians who were concerned with highlighting their roles in the history of the colonized parts of the world. The story of the mission is the story of how missionary workers managed to build churches among heathens who were deemed incorrigible by other official administrators.

One such missionary who figures prominently in the narratives was an American preacher Odoniram Judson, a founding member of the ‘American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,’ whose life is portrayed in a series of events guided by providence. Narrating his adventures, Sophie Bronson in *A Century of Baptist Foreign Missions* writes that Judson’s first overseas journey took place in the early nineteenth century when he left America for England so that he could present himself in front of the London Congregational Board. En route however, his ship was captured by a French ‘privateer’ and he was taken away to France. Thereafter, young Judson found himself locked up in a French prison. Fortunately, “God brought him safely out of all his distresses” (15) and freed him so that he was able to reach London and interact with the London missionaries and seek a collaboration between the two countries. However, owing to the distance between America and Europe, the London board requested Judson to establish their own independent missions in the colonies. This turn of events ensured that the American mission developed into an autonomous organization in charge of its own operations overseas.

Thus, on his return to America, Judson decided to strengthen the American mission and personally embark on a journey to India where he would establish an American church. In

1812, a newly married Judson along with his wife, Ann Hasseltine, and another missionary couple called the Newells boarded a ship headed to Calcutta. However, on reaching the Indian shores, the two couples were met with unexpected adversaries when the East India Company denied them entry. Instead of going back to America, the duo sought permission to go to the Isle of France [present-day Mauritius] which was duly accepted. The Newells left first as there were only two passenger seats available on the boat that was leaving at that time. The Judsons stayed for some more months and left India on January 11, 1813. On reaching the Isle of France the Judsons found that Mrs. Newell had died. Titterington writes “The terrible shock of this unexpected bereavement nearly prostrated Mrs. Judson,” (18). To add to the sense of anguish was the realization that the island offered “no adequate opening for mission work.” This sudden change of circumstances prompted the new widower Mr. Newell to move to Ceylon whereas Mr. and Mrs. Judson found themselves without an anchor. “Mrs. Judson wrote in her diary, ‘It seems as if there was no resting place for me on earth!’ Where could they go? Must they again enter the lion’s jaws?” (18). In this situation, the couple put all their faith in the Christian belief in “providence” to channel them towards the right path. “There seemed to be no other way, and on May 7 they embarked for Madras, trusting to the guiding finger of Providence” (18). Once again the couple found themselves unable to stay in India as the East India Company continued to have a hostile attitude towards missionary activities. The Judsons were directed to leave the country as soon as possible and were thus forced to board the only ship available on the dock at the time that was bound for Burma.

Thus, unplanned and chaotic, began the American Mission work in Burma where the Judsons found themselves in 1813. Though the Judsons wished to work in India, providence, it appears, took the upper hand in deciding which country the couple would ultimately serve. The couple saw their hardships as part of God’s plan and established a strong Baptist foundation in the new country. Mrs. Judson became the first white woman to be seen in

Rangoon making her a “great curiosity” among the locals. Additionally, the direction of their life pointed at the proverbial “planting of seeds” of Christianity in pagan places where it would go on to bear fruits with the passage time. In 1816, a printing press was installed and the gospels were translated into Burmese. Titterington mentions that a Burmese enquirer began to show interest in the Christian tract and catechism, and requested for “more of that writing”. Thus, “Mr. Judson gave him the first five chapters of Matthew, and he went away. From time to time they heard of his constant reading of the sacred books; but he never became an avowed Christian. Doubtless the fear of persecution deterred him. But it was a comforting proof that the Burman heart was not impenetrable; and it was a prophecy of a coming harvest.” (25)

The ‘story’ of the Judsons binds together the different elements of ‘history as story-telling’ by giving it what Hayden White would call “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (2). Through a vivid description of the missionary experiences in America, India, and Burma, the historian achieves a “fullness” and coherence that would otherwise be impossible to attain through annals and journal entries alone. The Judsons feature in many of the Baptist history books as they represent the Christian spirit which perseveres against heavy odds and proves God’s invisible hand in channelling history. When narrated as a story, Judson’s life experiences become an important turning point in the nineteenth century missionary expansion. Narrativity also takes the story forward and achieves “continuity” by presenting events as a sequence of multiple actions. From establishing a mission board in America to setting up a Baptist church in Burma, the life of Odoniram Judson becomes a series of inter-connected events guided by providence.

According to Hayden White, apart from providing coherence, “narrativity” makes events more “real” by giving it a human agency as the characters appear to be channelling the causal nature of time. Unlike annals where “things” happen to people such as draughts or floods, in narratives, it is the people who are in charge of the situation. Readers witness the plot

unfold vis-a-vis the actions undertaken by the characters. Missionary men and women become “model” Christian individuals not just because things happen to them but because they take the initiative to get things done. For instance, the first girls’ school for Garos of present-day Meghalaya was established through the untiring efforts of Mrs. Burdette as documented in *Following the Sunrise*. Montgomery in her work describes how the missionary woman painstakingly gathered the students one by one from a community that viewed the idea of women’s education with “amused incredulity” (82). According to Montgomery, when Mrs. Burdette first arrived to the North-East in 1887, she attempted to open a school in Tura (a town in present-day Meghalaya) where she encouraged Christian families to send their girls. Unfortunately for her, the residents of the area remained indifferent to the idea of women’s education and the school building remained empty for some time. Mrs. Burdette refused to be “defeated” by the apathy towards her cause and “resolved that, if the girls would not come to her, she would go to the girls” (82). She collected “a group of heathen coolies” and headed for the hills passing through “deep jungles, and fording the mountain streams” (82) in order to be able to meet the forest folks. The nearest village took a week to reach. During the course of the expedition, the small group visited fifteen villages to “overcome the prejudices of parents so far that they might allow her to take their daughters back to the station with her for a term of schooling” (82). To enroll more students, Mrs. Burdette spent a year living “in one of the mountain villages, to see if she could not break down the prejudices of the people and secure the foundation of a permanent school for girls” (83). Her determination finally began to bear fruits and by the “beginning of the next season,” she had 21 girl students willing to attend the classes in Tura. This is how the first girls’ school was established in present-day Meghalaya, through the supposed perseverance of Mrs. Burdette. The progress of the Baptist mission as well as that of the colonized places depended on such “heroic treatment” by its members. Whether it is through their efforts at opening schools or through door-to-door preaching, the

history of the mission portrays the missionaries as ‘doers.’ This treatment makes the events more real by making them seem closer to life.

Thirdly, narration evokes the real life conflict of law and human agency. Hayden White argues that the “reality” in historical narration is achieved by replicating a system of human relationships governed by law that “creates possibilities of tensions, conflicts, struggles and determine their various kinds of resolution” (14). In other words, readers are exposed to conflicts and resolution that mirror their own attempts at managing life thereby creating a parallel world in the narratives with similar successes and failures. The central theme of every missionary history revolves around the differences of law—on one side is the Christian law that dictates how people must conduct themselves, and on the other side are the superstitions and heathenism of the masses whose lifestyles are in direct conflict with the former. The resolution from the Christian perspective is to ultimately dissolve the differences and convert the population so that the clash of civilization can be mitigated. This struggle can be witnessed in many stories within the missionary narrative where missionary men and women attempt to instil Christian values among the natives. Other than having faith in God, it involves surrendering all former heathen beliefs related to the customs of birth, death and marriage. In *Our Gold Mine*, Ada Chaplin records that the biggest challenge for the missionaries was to convince people to give up their caste and to forsake opium. She notes that the Hindus of Assam would frequently ask the missionaries, “But, if I become a Christian, shall I not lose caste?” (307). When the missionaries replied in the affirmative, “many a hopeful inquirer turned away decidedly and forever” (307). Some converts would also end up relapsing into opium use and lose their church membership. According to Hayden White, this struggle between two opposing forces has a ‘resemblance’ in the lived experiences of the readers which makes it possible for them to identify historical works as “real.” In doing so, however, narrative history seems to

borrow the same tropes as that of literary fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that became true to real life through close imitation.

2.6.1 Between fact and fiction

It is to be noted that narrativity in history-writing has to deal with the central paradox of representing “true” events by borrowing literary conventions of the “imaginary”. The description of events follows the same techniques of realist fiction that developed in the eighteenth century and nineteenth century in the form of the ‘novel’. Even the notion of history’s close ‘imitation of life’ has its counterpart in the realist novels of the times which focused on making the ‘story’ real for the readers. In this connection, Ian Watt notes that the eighteenth century formal realism of the novel “allows a more immediate imitation of individual experience set in its temporal and spatial environment than do other literary forms. Consequently the novel’s conventions ... explains why the majority of readers in the last two hundred years have found in the novel the literary form which most closely satisfies their wishes for a close correspondence between life and art” (31-32).⁶⁴ The nineteenth century ‘novel’ emphasized on interior characterization of the characters by describing their spiritual and emotional conditions. This mode of narration explained why characters behaved the way they did which in turned propelled the story forward. Watt makes two more observations about the novel that might as well have been used to define the episteme of historical narratives. First, the protagonists and plots of the novel are from real life. The plots of the earliest novels such as ones by William Defoe and Samuel Richardson were not derived from mythology, history, legend or previous literature but were sourced from contemporary times. Second, it provided a platform for writers to represent the modern period’s understanding of “truth” as an individual pursuit. In other words, novels achieved realism by challenging the universals and focusing

⁶⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, University of California Press, first published in 1957 by Chatto, London.

instead on the method of pursuing the truth as a “wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought” (12). It set one individual apart from another by harping on to their struggles and motives. In missionary narratives, this is often done by attesting a certain merit to individual missionaries by describing their unique struggles in the colonies. Thus, Mr. Odoniram Judson is a Mr. Brown who was the first to arrive in Assam, is an expert linguist who translated tracts from the Bible into local languages; Mr. Cutter is the manager of the printing press at first in Nowgong and then Sibsagor, while Mrs. Burdette is the heroic woman who started a girls’ school among the Garo heathens. Despite belonging to the same faith and mission, these individuals are separated by their “unique” and “new” experiences.

By having a similar trope as that of fiction, historical narration then becomes suspect due to its compulsion to have a rounded and finished ‘story’ with a coherent plot that is not available in real life. As White puts it, “Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories? Or does it present itself more in the way that the annals and chronicles suggest, either as a mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude?” (24). Missionary historians often conclude their works on a note of jubilation at their achievements. Does life conclude in a similar fashion?

2.6.2 The question of evidence

The historians usually respond to Hayden White’s thesis by mobilizing the concept of ‘evidence’ that separates fiction from reality. They emphasize that a historian has a methodological need to subscribe to evidentiary protocols involving a process of in-depth research. In other words, the ‘story’ has to be backed by the crucial factor of “evidence” that is missing in the realm of the imaginary. The achievements of the mission and the internal

workings of the missionary characters are sourced from the annual reports, journals, diaries, notes and letters of the protagonists and have some bases in actuality. Nowhere is it more visible than in *Assam Mission* where the history of each mission station mentions verifiable dates and cites the sources (mostly annual reports) of information.

According to Carlo Ginzburg, the historian is often analogous to a “judge” whose final hypothesis is based on “evidence,” “clue” and “proof”.⁶⁵ A historian is viewed as someone sieving through a series of information and facts available to them, whether collected by themselves or by antiquarians, and coming up with a final verdict. Being a “judge” also connotes a distance between the person and the facts surrounding the events. Paradoxically, it also required “a vivid representation of characters and situations” where the historian was expected to make a “convincing argument by communicating the illusion of reality” (80).

In mission history, the historian juggles the space between historical facts on one side and tropes of narrative fiction on the other, to construct a plot where the mission is portrayed as a heroic venture to salvage the people of colonized lands. The experiences of individual missionaries are hand-picked to that end. This gives a moralistic undercurrent to the whole enterprise in what White terms as the “moralizing impulse”.

The missionary writers, therefore, emerge as problematic historians as the system of human relationships with its possibilities of tensions, conflicts, struggles and resolutions they create is already embedded in moral agenda with which they take up the task of recording the historical progression of their field. Reality in the narratives is tinted by the evangelical writer’s own vision of what the history ought to be from her point of view. The urge to “moralize” the narratives leads to a juxtaposition of the existing social systems with what the writers perceive

⁶⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No.), pp. 79-92.

as their own superior model of civilization. This juxtaposition is an essential element of the historical experience of colonization. This is where the primary conflict between an avowed promotion of egalitarianism and the strengthening of empire building occurs. This conflict requires a selective representation of reality. This history-ness of missionary archives played an important role in consolidating the North-East as a British colony. By representing the way that things were heathen and uncivilized, compared to the superior moral conduct of the evangelists, the missionary writers built up the region as a prime field for imperialism.

Indeed, White argues that all narration revolves around the urge to moralize. The demand for closure of a historical narration is the demand for a moral drama. “Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too” (24). In historical narration by the Baptist missions, the moral drama is very much present in the creation of binaries that have already been highlighted by many post-colonial critics—good versus evil, civilized versus uncivilized, empowered woman versus the exploited native. There is collaboration between narrativity’s propensity to moralize and the historian’s own moral impulses. Arnaldo Momigliano in his essay “Historicism Revisited” highlights this uneasy relationship between a historian and the inescapable imprint of his/her episteme in which the finished product leans towards an ideology.⁶⁶ According to him, the process of writing history includes “selection of the evidence and explanation and evaluation of the facts emerging from the selected evidence” (4). This is done under the ambit of provisional hypothesis in which the historian has an understanding of what his project is about. For example a historian choosing facts on feudalism will have some ideas of what feudalism is. Throughout the exercise the historian has to correlate between the evidence he can find, the interpretations of past historians and the hypothesis that gets modified when new evidence is unearthed. Historians, therefore, while not unaffected by personal “moral” judgment, are still

⁶⁶ Arnaldo Momigliano, “Historicism Revisited,” North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974.

dependent on facts to get their stories right. History is however “morally-coloured” which is why there is an existence of feminist history, black history and subaltern history that exhibit different ideological leanings.

2.7 The mission historians

The mission historians were active members of the American Baptist churches. Sophie Titterington was the fifth child of Miles Bronson, a missionary to Assam who preached in Nowgong, Guwahati and Dibrugarh for close to 40 years.⁶⁷ Titterington wrote ten textbooks, both fictional and non-fictional, to be taught in schools by the Baptist Mission. They were published by the American Baptist Publication Society.

Mrs. Ada. C. Chaplin was a prolific missionary writer who wrote around eight books about Christianity. Other than *Our Gold Mine* she also wrote *Christ's Cadets* (1870) and *The Old Year and the New* (1883). Through her writings, she taught the young children of America about the importance and the necessity of the mission.

The third writer, Helen Barrett Montgomery, was one of the most popular figures among women missionaries of the nineteenth. She was a women's rights activist, suffragette, author, and teacher who spent her life working for the different denominations of the American Baptist mission. Montgomery was born into a religious family where her father worked as a pastor at the Lake Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester. In 1893, Montgomery and a fellow missionary woman, Susan B. Anthony, formed the Women's Educational and Industrial Union “to assist women in self-improvement and working conditions”.⁶⁸ In 1900, she organized a fund raiser to open the University of Rochester to women which, till then, was only open to male students. In 1910, she published *Western Women in Eastern Lands*, a study that surveyed

⁶⁷ Miles Bronson Family Papers, Yale Divinity School Library (available online).

⁶⁸ Western New York Suffragists: Winning the Vote, “Helen Barrett Montgomery”, Web, <https://rrlc.org/winningthevote/biographies/helen-barrett-montgomery/>

the status of women in Asia. Montgomery through her efforts helped to raise \$1 million dollars, much of which went to establish Christian women's colleges in Asia. In 1913, at the request of the Federation of Women's Boards of Foreign Missions, she traveled around the world in order to survey and to prepare reports on the different missions. She visited Japan, the Middle East, Vellore, and Burma.⁶⁹ Her report, *The King's Highway*, was published in 1915 and it sold more than 160,000 copies. Montgomery also served as the president of the Women's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (1914 – 1924). In 1924 she became the first woman scholar to translate The New Testament for the general reader. Montgomery died in 1934 at the age of 73.

These writers were not “detached judges” but promoters of the Christian cause thereby raising concerns of objectivity. Post-colonial writers have frequently noted how colonial histories were written with an agenda in mind. In *The Historiography of Christianity in India*, John Webster notes that mission histories “were written by Western authors and published in the West for a Western readership”.⁷⁰ Since their target was the West, the histories did not give adequate importance to the past of India but were aimed at telling the “history of missions and missionaries from the West, of their work, their methods, their successes and failures in India” so that readers might appreciate the “present work and current issues by viewing them in a historical perspective” (32).

Not only that, the Baptist Christian history writing had a purpose and writers had to select information based on how well it promoted their cause. Webster writes that the theological idea behind church history is “the preservation of the Church from error, the production and maintenance of holiness within her, and the performance of miracles” (71).

⁶⁹ William Henry Brackney, “The Legacy of Helen Barrett Montgomery and Lucy W. Peabody”, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 1991 (174-178).

⁷⁰ John C.B. Webster, *Historiography of Christianity in India*, Oxford Univ Press, 2012.

This definition indicates that “the historian is studying an empirical institution with well-defined elements and clear-cut boundaries so that he/she knows who and what is included; who and what is excluded; who and what is important; who and what is not important” (72).

2.8 Reading the historical narratives on the North-East

Evangelical and colonial historiography split the ‘past’ of the North-East into a pre-historical and a historical period where the arrival of the mission and the colonial government marked the phase of transition. Missionary historiography acknowledged that the landmass they call ‘Assam and the neighbouring hills’ had a past. But while they took the effort of preserving and printing the Assamese Aryan past, they did not recognize the past of the ‘neighbouring hills’ as history. The categories used to describe their past are mostly that of legends and myths. The mission sees itself as producing the modern history of the region. The autobiographies and biographies of the mission take particular care to maintain temporal records. The diary entries and the monthly/yearly reports also record the time period. By keeping a minute record of time, they produce the present or they turn the present into recorded historical time.

2.8.1 Producing ‘Assam and the Neighbouring Hills’

The British administration first got in contact with the kingdoms of Assam, Cachar and Jaintia after the acquisition of the Diwani of Bengal. However, it was not until Burma had attacked Assam in 1817 that the British began to take a keen interest in the landmass. In a bid to ‘protect’ its boundaries, the British got Burma to sign the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 in which the latter surrendered its claim on Assam. Subsequently, after taking control of the Assam administration, the British began to annex the adjoining hills till it gained the governance of the entire area from Assam to Tripura. Gradually, the bureaucratic official history began to refer to the newly-acquired landmass as ‘North-East’ due to its geographical

positioning with relation to Bengal. Alexander Mackenzie was most likely the first to use the term “Northeast Frontier” to identify Assam and the hills in his book of 1884. In the 1890s and early 1900s when there was a plan to merge Assam with Eastern Bengal, there were proposals to name the area “North Eastern Province” that was ultimately dropped after opposition from local political pressure groups.⁷¹

Meanwhile, missionary historians’ nomenclature for the landmass also kept shifting. In the beginning it was just called Assam with its variety of ethnicities—Ahoms, Khamtis, Singpos and other Shan tribes. Soon, however, they seemed more inclined to look at “North-East” as a composite of multiple mission ‘fields’, each populated by a tribe that has its own language and beliefs. These individual tribes were entrusted to the care of a missionary/missionary team who learned the languages, translated texts and set up schools and churches. In *Our Gold Mine*, the historian even calls the area “North-West” due to its location in relation to Burma where the Mission first began its enterprise in Asia. In the early 1900s, after the completion of more than 70 years in the North-East, the American Baptists still identified the people separately in terms of their tribal identities such as Garos, Nagas and Mikirs who were racially and culturally different from the Hindus of the Assam valley and the rest of India. Till 1915 when the last of the books in this chapter was published, they were not collectively referred to as “North-East”. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, there was a making of a collective under the project of “Assam Mission” that covered every tribe on the borders of the Aryan Assam, cut off from Burma after the Treaty of Yandaboo. Many missionaries were in awe of the beauty of the mountain and heaped eloquent praises upon its natural beauty.

⁷¹ Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, People’s Publishing House, 1977, Page: 73.

2.8.2 Missionary historical narrative and the production of meaning

Mission historiography relied on allegory to generate meaning. In its basic form, allegory means that texts are encrypted with meanings beyond what is immediately available. In Christian context, the hidden meanings are usually moral in tone and nature. A prime example of Christian allegorical text is *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by John Bunyan. It narrates the story of a man called Christian who embarks on a journey to heaven. During the course of his travel, he meets with many adversities and only when he is able to overcome them is he able to reach the gates and receive salvation. The story served as a universal text of a follower's quest for redemption by locking the plot in a battle between good and evil where Christian represented good and the adversities represented evil in its various forms. Another text that carried forward the image of a Christian hero was written and published by Richard Steele in 1701. Titled *The Christian Hero*, the copy ran into ten editions due to its popularity. In this work, Steele projects Jesus' disciple Paul as a quintessential Christian hero in his display of duty, courage, journey and sacrifice. Steele suggests that unlike well-known Romans such as Caesar and Cato who are revered among the English, a real hero is someone who lives his life on Christian virtues.

In the nineteenth century, the figure of Bunyan's Christian and Steel's Paul resonated with the missionary societies that were being established around the world. As these societies began to depute their members to Africa, Polynesia and India, they felt that the figure of the lone missionary who faced umpteen perils to extend the Kingdom of God reflected the figure of the Christian hero immortalized in the previous texts. According to Isabel Hofmeyr, who has written extensively on the correlation between Bunyan and colonialism, such an imagination made Bunyan an "English icon," and *Pilgrim's Progress* a most "prized cultural

possessions” of the missionary enterprise.⁷² As a result, the text was translated into many languages and became second only to the Bible in its popularity and reach. Just as *Pilgrim's Progress* used the idea of good versus evil as a plot device, missionary historical narration too re-worked a similar allegory.

The parallel between fact and fiction deepens in this battle between the two civilizations as historical narration evokes an allegorical element in the very act of narrating a story, similar to the way fiction works. According to Hayden White, this interpretive play of language where narratives are “saying one thing and meaning another” (45) cannot be overlooked in historical narration as it is what leads to the “transformation of a chronicle into a story” (48). By subscribing to this fictional troupe, missionary historiography created the divide between Christian heroism and native heathenism. When Ada Chaplin calls colonized lands a “battle-ground” in her preface, it is a manifestation of the overall missionary ideology that imbibed the good versus evil allegory of texts like *Pilgrim's Progress*. It had several features.

First, narrativity involved constructing a Christian hero who is bound to a sense of divine duty. It dictates him to journey to the colonized places to spread Christianity and prepare the world for the second coming. Just as Bunyan's Christian followed the path laid down by Christ, the life of the missionary hero was dictated by the preaching of the Bible. In their construction of the hero, American missionaries also found inspiration in the real-life heroism of Scottish missionary David Livingstone (1813-1873) who spent his life preaching in Africa. Livingstone personified the goodness of the true Christian hero, exemplified in *Pilgrim's Progress*, as he evoked the image of the lonely figure journeying into a vast continent. According to Jeffrey Cox, David Livingstone and his publicists “created a durable image of

⁷² Isabel Hofmeyr, *How Bunyan Became English: Missionaries, Translation, and the Discipline of English Literature*, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Jan., 2002), (84-119).

the missionary as an itinerant in a pith helmet, preaching the gospel to non-Christian peoples under the shade of a palm tree, and dying a heroic death in the attempt to open up the non-western world to the benefits of Christianity and civilization” (152).⁷³ Livingstone became a legend and dictated the standards to which all future missionaries must adhere to in order to fulfil their duties as a Christian. Hence, missionary history began to write about the journey of the pioneering missionaries who travelled from one place to another, meeting natives and telling them about the gospel.

Second, historical narrative required a thick description of the dangers that lurked in the colony and the obstinate refusal by the hero to give up the quest in the face of these dangers. In American Baptist history, Odiniram Judson’s imprisonment in Burma, the Clarks attempt at contacting the Nagas and the Browns’ journey to Assam details the magnitude of the perils that surround the missionaries. They suffer personal losses, natural disasters, and frequent death threats before they are able to establish a mission station. In *Following the Sunrise*, Helen Montgomery details some of these important episodes from the mission’s history and also highlights that the missionaries are able to survive the dangers owing to their patience and faith. Describing one such episode, Montgomery writes about the journey of Miles Bronson from Calcutta to Assam by boat:

In 1837 Miles Bronson and Jacob Thomas, with their wives, braved the perils of the eight-hundred-mile voyage from Calcutta in the usual native boat, nearly perished during the hardships of the trip, and when they were within an hour of Sadiya Mr. Thomas was accidentally killed. When an English officer had urged Mr. Bronson not to attempt the ascent of the river that season, his reply was

⁷³ Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700*, Routledge, 2007.

characteristic of the quality of the man: 'Would you hesitate,' he asked, 'if you were ordered to join the regiment in Sadiya?'

'No, sir,' came the quick reply.

'Then we dare not delay when our heavenly Captain bids us advance to join the little force awaiting and expecting our arrival.' (73)

The above description added to the overall allegory of the Christian fight against evil and led to the archetype of the missionaries as 'heroic' who were wholly dedicated to the evangelical mission and were determined to perform their duties under hostile circumstances. The events received fuller descriptions in the memoirs and journals of the missionaries themselves in which they remembered the lives of their friends and children who ultimately could not survive their stay in the colonies. Memorialization of missionary heroism can be seen as a part of its narrative economy where personal losses became intertwined with glory.

Third, the construction of the missionary hero required an anti-thesis. Throughout the histories, this anti-thesis came in various shapes such as that of the violent head-hunting Nagas, the obstinate and ignorant Hindu pundit, the locals opposing the new religion, and the unhealthy natural environment that caused fatal diseases. The missionary is seen interacting with all such elements and arguing the ways in which Christianity served as a better model for living one's life. In addition, by juxtaposing the conduct of the missionary man as upright, moral, truthful and rational against the violence and superstition of the locals, the narratives ensure that the hero is symbolic of Christian character.

Fourth, historical narratives involved the construction of witnesses who would verify the missionary's claim to heroism. Often, this witness was the missionary wife who recorded the works of her husband as he toiled in the "field." The writings of Anna Kay Scott, Mary Mead Clark, and Hattie Rivenburg all contribute to the creation of a missionary hero who is

smart/intelligent, a family man, and who thrives on his belief in Christ.⁷⁴ Hattie in her letters to her family describe episodes in which her husband, Dr. Sidney Rivenburg, exhibited acts of bravery and sacrifice. For instance he killed a snake that was found coiled in a closet, nursed a man who had been wounded in a tiger attack, and survived many fevers of the jungles. Dr. Rivenburg also worked as a preacher and doctor in fields such as Sibasagor and Molung located in Assam and Nagaland respectively.

2.8.3 Tensions in the narrative economy of mission historiography

The histories were written under two modes of narrative—the allegory of Christian heroism and the realism of modern history writing. The creation of the archetype of the heroic missionary suffered from an inherent ambivalence that the two modes were unable to resolve. Despite the missionary hero being based on the model of Bunyan’s Christian and David Livingstone, the practicalities of the mission enterprise demanded a few relaxations. First, according to Jeffrey Cox, in contrast to the effort spent in the construction of a missionary hero as someone who is always on the move from one hamlet to another fighting one evil or another, in reality, a vast majority of missionaries were busy in establishing permanent mission stations and schools. It belied the narrative that replicated the continuous journey of Bunyan’s Christian till he reaches heaven. The missionaries had realized early on that it was only through school education that the native life and thoughts could be rapidly influenced and therefore set about taking up the role of teachers. Many missionaries built and lived in mission bungalows where they set up schools and churches within the compound. Constructing homes, however temporary they may be, creates tensions with the motif of continuous journey. Affection for

⁷⁴Anna Kay Scott wrote *Korno Siga: The Mountain Chief* (1889), Mary Mead Clark wrote *A Corner in India* (1907), and Hattie Rivenburg narrated the experiences of her stay in North-East in letters that she wrote to her family back in America. These letters along with those of her husband were later printed by their daughter Narola under the title “*The Star of Naga Hills*” (1941).

the local station comes across as a jarring note to the motif of the journey. The heroism in historical narratives, therefore, become sporadic episodes and did not necessarily describe the way in which a majority of missionaries lived and worked.

Second, the missionary did not travel and work alone but employed a body of native helpers, most of them heathen, in order to pursue his work. Every step of the way, from carrying the missionary on their backs through mountainous paths to protecting him and his family from physical attacks, the locals had a big role to play in safeguarding the missionary enterprise. The narratives do not reflect this dependence on native helpers and preachers for the establishment of the missions. The histories of heroism are restricted to the trials and tribulations of the male American missionary who was at the centre of a network of associates.

Third, the production of evil is undercut by the necessity of ensuring that the subjects are not ‘too evil’ for redemption as it would make the whole enterprise futile. Hence, histories had to make room for the subtlety of heathen characteristics as not entirely incorrigible. For instance, in *Following the Sunrise*, Montgomery briefly puts a pause to the defamation of hill tribes to mention that they were in fact “brave and hardy mountaineers” (86). She further writes, “The people are dirty and ignorant and degraded, but they have good stuff in them” (86) so as to build them as prime subjects for intervention.

2.9 The native convert and the transfer of symbolism

The allegorical function of missionary historical narrative can be divided into two stages. The first stage consisted of the construction of the white missionary as a heroic figure embroiled in an ideological battle of good versus evil. Eventually the hero succeeds in converting the first batch of heathen natives into good Christians and then establishes the first congregation. The second stage showcases the manner in which Christian heroism is transferred onto the converts who then carry on the torch of Christianity back to their villages

in the interiors. The converts begin to become aware of the sinfulness of their ways and seek to bring about changes. They imbibe the qualities that went into the making of the heroic missionary. As Jean and John Comaroff write in *Of Revelation and Revolution*, the consciousness associated with the phase of colonization involve a “process in which the ‘savages’ of colonialism are ushered, by earnest Protestant evangelists, into the revelation of their own misery, are promised salvation through self-discovery and civilization, and are drawn into a conversation with the culture of modern capitalism—only to find themselves enmeshed, willingly or not, in its order of signs and values, interests and passions, wants and needs. Even the established modes of protest open to them speak in ringing Christian terms—terms like civil rights, civilized liberties, freedom of conscience” (xii).⁷⁵

For natives, the only way to modernize, was to recognize their destitution and aim for a Christian experience to overcome it. To that end they were expected to imitate the lives of the white missionaries and face some of the same challenges as them. Traces of this can be seen in the story of three native converts who become the symbols of missionary achievement in the North-East. Kandura, Omed, and Ramkhe were three natives who became the poster boys of evangelical modernity and they were briefly mentioned in the missionary “histories” as examples of missionary achievement. The three men came in contact with the missionaries at the beginning of the missionary enterprise in the nineteenth century. Kandura was from Assam and he was converted in 1849, whereas Ramkhe and Omed were the first Garo converts in 1863. The historians heaped praise on Kandura because of his steadfast dedication to the church. The books narrate how through his Christian schooling, Kandura grew up to be a qualified young man and was so “capable” that he received a job in the office of the British government at a salary of Rs. 40 per month in Guwahati. It was considered a big salary for a

⁷⁵ Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolutions: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 1991.

local native. Around that time, however, the Guwahati church of the Baptist Mission did not have a pastor and was therefore unable to function to its optimum capacity. When Kandura found out about this crisis, he willingly offered to leave his job to take up the church work at Rs. 15 per month. Dr. Bronson asked him, “Can you hold on till some one arrives?” to which Kandura replied, “My wish is to hold onto death.”⁷⁶ Titterington writes that the “story of Kandura is one of the many thrilling incidents in missionary annals” (116). Kandura’s rise from being a member of an uncivilized tribe to becoming a model missionary native is a testament to the success of the mission enterprise. He also fits the evidentiary paradigm by proving that the natives, although barbaric and wild, retain certain virtuousness that makes them fit for conversion.

Kandura became a preacher and went on to become a mentor to the other two men, Ramkhe and Omed. These two Garo men had developed an interest in Christianity when they joined the first batch of students at the missionary school in Goalpara that was opened in 1847. Providence seems to have played a role here too as Ramkhe’s admission to the school was possible only because he had broken his arm as a child which made him incapable of joining his family’s traditional vocation of farming. After receiving education at the missionary school, Ramkhe and Omed, who were also related by blood, joined the British administration as sepoy. Montgomery writes that one day, while readying a bungalow for an army officer, Ramkhe found a torn fragment of a Christian tract. He read it and was touched by religious fervor. He decided that he should continue reading more about Christianity. He then took the tract and gave it to Omed as well. Together, they decided to approach Kandura to mentor them.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Kandura’s story finds a place in Helen Montgomery’s *Following the Sunrise* (75) and Titterington’s *A Century of Baptist Mission* (116)

⁷⁷ It is perhaps important to note here that there is a discrepancy in the story from one author to another. In *Our Gold Mine*, Chaplin writes that it was Omed who found the tract while

Around the same time Ramkhe was discharged from service because of his broken arm which was “God’s means of blessing him”⁷⁸ and in time, Omed also quit his job so that he could wholly devote himself to the call of evangelical service. The two men were then baptized by Dr. Bronson in 1863. Soon after the conversion, Omed and Ramkhe went back to the hills to spread the Gospel among their people. “Ramkhe opened a school, while Omed went from village to village, telling the story of the gospel” (78). They worked as a team where each had a role. They preached among the natives but they met stiff resistance from the people. Their tribe members were filled with a “fury of which drove them from the mountain villages” (78). Unwilling to be shaken from their chosen path, Omed and Ramkhe decided to open their own worship place away from their ancestral villages. Historians write that Omed “stationed himself by the path where all the hillfolk must pass when they came down to market at Gauhati” (78). In time, as the number of devotees grew, Omed set up a village called Rajasimla where he and other Christian families settled themselves and where Dr. Bronson “organized the first church of forty Garo Christians” (78). By 1869, Montgomery writes, there were 140 Christians in the Garo Hills.

In *Our Gold Mine*, Ada Chaplin also mentions Omed and Ramkhe. She especially notes down the reaction of the white Colonel under whom Omed worked before becoming a preacher. She writes that the Colonel was impressed by his decision to join the pastorate and expressed: “I am sorry Omed wishes to leave the regiment...as he is a very steady, well-conducted sepoy; quite an example to many in the regiment” (327). Omed and Ramkhe were the sort of converts that the mission and the bureaucrats hoped to multiply in the North-East as part of the colonial

readying a bungalow but in *Following the Sunrise* the experience is ascribed to Ramkhe. E.G Philips, a local missionary who presented a paper at the Jubilee Conference also ascertains that it was Ramkhe who found the tracts. This mismatch is probably a result of the fact that the converts were interchangeable as they came from the same tribe and were related to one another by blood.

⁷⁸ E.G. Philips, “Historical Sketch of the Garo Field”, *Assam Mission*, 1886.

expansion. Through the inclusion of stories of the local converts and setting them as ‘examples’ for others to follow, the missionary historians validated their own value system. Kandura, Ramkhe and Omed are shown to have imbibed the qualities that the books have found praiseworthy among the original white missionaries and which have now been transferred to the local converts. It is owing to stories of the conversions and the converts that Montgomery writes in her dedication: “To the goodly fellowship of Baptist Missionaries in every land, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises...the sacrifices of the pioneering missionaries have not been in vain”. Indeed, the initial hardships faced by missionaries such as Mr. Brown, Mr. Bronson, and Dr. Clark find fulfillment and validation in the form of the converts.

2.10 The castaway convert

Alongside the “good natives” Kandura, Ramkhe and Omed, existed a multitude of other converted natives who did not live up to the lofty standards expected of them. The native converts were under much surveillance and had to constantly prove their merits or lose membership. One such convert who rose from the ranks and then fell from grace was Godhula Brown who started out as a devout Christian but was dismissed from service in later years. He is best known for his services in the Naga Hills. When Dr. Clark established the first Christian Naga village in 1876, it was Godhula who had prepared the ground for the missionary’s arrival. A dedicated member of the Baptist church, Godhula impressed the mission with his work and was ordained in 1881. The story of his rise and his subsequent fall is noted in *Assam Mission* and *Our Gold Mine*. Ada C. Chaplin writes that in 1871, Godhula, who was an assistant to the mission enterprise, was asked to learn the Naga language and explore the Naga Hills (334). At first, Godhula found that the men and women would not speak to him. He was suspected of being a British spy and was shunned. Gradually though, the residents of the Naga village began

to be convinced of “his real object” and welcomed him into their homes. He preached among them for many years alongside Dr. Clark.

His fate changed in 1886 when a committee of church members found Godhula guilty of a “confessed misconduct” (*Assam Mission*, x) and cancelled his membership. The three-member committee that had tried the case consisted of two White missionaries—M. C. Mason and A. K. Gurney—and one native missionary called Tuni J. Goldsmith. Their report notes: “We, as members of the Conference, deem it our sad duty, in consideration of his attitude against the church, and confessed misconduct, to withdraw from Rev. Godhula R. Brown, our fellowship as a minister of the gospel.” After a reply by Godhula, the motion was carried. It was also voted “that this Conference recommend the Sibsagar church to rescind the ordination of Godhula R. Brown, and withdraw from him the hand of Christian fellowship, and that they make their best efforts, in the spirit of the gospel, to restore him” (x-xi). *Assam Mission* does not offer any details about this alleged misconduct but Geraldine Forbes writes that Godhula lost his membership due his addiction to alcohol and opium.⁷⁹ On losing Godhula, the missionary S. W. Rivenburg notes “He is a sad example of the warning, ‘Lest when we have preached to others we ourselves should be cast away’” (82).

Though Godhula was dismissed from his service officially, he kept working as a missionary nonetheless. He set up his own Baptist Church at Jorhat, Assam in 1889 which still functions today.⁸⁰ In recent times, as Churches have begun to appreciate and recognize the contributions of local natives in spreading the Gospel, Godhula’s name has appeared more frequently in Indian newspapers. News clippings eulogize him for his role in establishing the first church in Mokokchung district of Nagaland where he continues to be a “household

⁷⁹ Geraldine Fobes, *Good Christians and Blood-Thirsty Savages*. Forbes writes in the notes that Godhula withdrew from the American Mission in 1885. He was characterized as a drunkard and opium addict.

⁸⁰ “Godhula’s Church to attain 125 yrs”, *The Morung Express*, 2011.

name”.⁸¹ In the article that appeared in Telegraph India, the correspondent notes that “though much of the credit for spreading Christianity in the Naga hills of the then Assam state has been given to an American missionary, Edward Winter Clarke, Godhula was the first missionary to set foot in Naga hills in 1871.” In Sibsagar, a school was established in 1978 called Godhula Brown Memorial English Higher Secondary School, in memory of the convert and preacher.

While Godhula and his evangelical work is still remembered in the North-East by the locals, he gets side-lined from the latter historical narrative of the pioneering missionaries—*A Century of Baptist Foreign Mission* and *Following the Sunrise*. In the last two books, the credit of the Naga Mission, where Godhula toiled for many years, is solely attributed to Dr. Clark. It points towards the ambivalence faced by the histories where they were restricted by the necessities of their narrative framework. Colonial historiography could find only a particular kind of space for native preachers. Either obedience or errant, the complicated story of Godhula Brown could not be accommodated in the limited binary of the missionary historical mode of narration.

2.11 Conclusion

William Hutchinson, while writing about the American Baptist Mission, highlights that even though missionaries claimed a universal brotherhood and insisted that their “Christian identity transcended any other”, it did not prevent them from “acknowledging and glorifying their identities as Westerners and Americans” (4).⁸² Their histories gloss over the failures of the white missionaries as well as castaway converts and focuses on the success stories. The narrative shapes the expected interpretation of the texts by promoting its white missionaries

⁸¹ Church pays tribute to missionary - Credit given to Godhula Brown for spreading Christianity in Naga hills, The Telegraph India, 20/02/2019, web.

⁸² William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

under the title of “heroic endurance” (*Following the Sunrise*, 76) for their unfailing dedication to the evangelical movement. Both men and women channel the Christian spirit by introducing it as a means of achieving education, language, modern medicine as well as an indomitable spirit. While Kandura, Ramkhe and Omed prove to supplement this understanding of the evangelical enterprise, Godhula gets edited out of the narrative.

All this is achieved via the use of realism and meaning creation where scattered events are selected to form a coherent whole. White writes, “On this view, a specifically historical event is not one that can be inserted into a ‘story’ wherever the writer wishes; it is rather a kind of event that can ‘contribute’ to ‘the development of a plot’” (51). The choice of ‘events’ in missionary history contribute towards consolidating the positive image of the Baptist Mission by showing how it elevated the living conditions of the heathen masses. It also cloaked the role of the missionary enterprise in the overall colonization of the North-East and established the superiority of the British rule.

The realism of historical narratives turns the white missionary worker into an epitome of moral uprightness, sacrifice, devotion, industriousness and unflinching faith—traits that are missing to a higher degree among natives. Similarly, the women are portrayed as self-sacrificing companions who were tasked with writing journals and textbooks, and with managing the missionary schools that were set up in many places across North-East India. Together, they saw themselves as agents of modernity who were sowing the seeds of change.

Chapter 3

The Manufacture of Desire: Ethnographic realism and the making of the North-East

3.1 Introduction

In her memoir *A Corner in India* (1907), missionary woman Mary Mead Clark employs ethnographic realism to describe her three decades of residence and work among the Ao Naga tribe of North-East India.⁸³ Under ethnographic realism, authors present their anthropological recordings in the form of a well-woven story. Mrs. Clark and other missionaries like her studied the population of the North-East and jotted down their observation of the people and their lifestyles.

Mrs. Clack's memoir underlines the two important themes that the chapter wishes to elaborate on—how ethnographic realism contributed to the self-image of the missionaries and how desire played a major role in imposing that image on the natives. Recalling her initial days, the author narrates how soon after her arrival there was a struggle between a tranquil missionary domesticity and its trespassing by native hill men. While living temporarily in Sibsagor, Assam, she remembers that a group of Ao Naga men had appeared at the mission bungalow one day and had tried to forcefully sell her a goat that they had brought along. Mrs. Clark recalls that despite her repeated refusals, “these strange, uncivilised men down from their mountain fastness, still persisted in dragging up the steps of the veranda of our bungalow, a large, long and horned hill goat hoping to receive from us double or quadruple its value” (1). Even though this was her first time meeting the Naga tribesmen, Mrs. Clark echoes the colonial sentiments passed down from missionary to missionary reserved for people from the hills—

⁸³ Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907.

that the tribals did not possess the refinement of the Westerners in their mannerisms as evident in their lack of respect for the missionary's domestic privacy.

As the Clarks go on to study the lives and beliefs of the natives, they infer that the latter is of inferior “nature” as they fail to live up to the standards of the “superior” missionary civilization. This comparison and the resultant evangelical intervention led to a reform movement that brought about rapid and drastic changes in the lifestyle of the people. The missionaries introduced schools, hostels, churches, vocational courses, and printing presses to pull the population out of their “destitution”. These changes manifested themselves in a rise in literacy and a reform of mannerisms. Many natives gave up alcohol, wore westernized versions of their traditional outfits, and gave up pagan rituals.

In this chapter I argue that missionary ethnography, in this case, that of the American Baptist Mission, coaxed and sustained the discourse that its object—the savage natives—formed a society that could be dismantled and rebuilt with new components, through close supervision. This construction of culture around colonized subjects hinged on the idea of human ‘desire’ as a central force that can be shaped and designed in such a way that a community can be persuaded to reform. The chapter understands “desire” as a strong inclination towards certain ideology, self-image and symbolism that ultimately dictates the conduct of the individual and the community. In missionary ethnographic realism, one can observe that a careful conditioning of the impulses surrounding ‘desire’ ensured that education, cleanliness, and scientific outlook appeared to be viable alternatives to the indigenous culture portrayed as illiterate, wild and barbaric. Colonial forces, in this case the missionaries, became conduit for the normalization of these values that would ultimately manifest itself in the behavioural pattern of the natives as good Christians. In other words, ethnography sustained

the missionary project in which writing about themselves and their relationship with the natives strengthened the conviction about the missionary enterprise and its ability to reform the people.

Ethnography, thus, functioned at two levels—first, writing served to reinforce the white missionaries' self-image and the civilizing mission which directly flowed from the self-image. Ethnography sustained their social presence in the region. Second, the ethnographies enabled the missionaries to consciously reflect on the techniques of managing people. By recording scenes of encounters with the indigenous population through this mode of ethnographic realism, the mission created, over the years, voluminous repositories of details of conduct. This body of literature served as an evolving source of reference for future missions. That is, these constructed the ethnographic figure of the ideal missionary.

To this end, I highlight two related notions of uncivilized behavior that deeply concerned the missionaries—violence and the occult among the natives to delve into how ethnography changed their configuration among the new population of the North-East.

The chapter focuses on selected works of American Baptist Mission workers stationed in parts of North-East India. Apart from *A Corner in India*, this chapter shall study *A Garo Jungle Book* (1919) by missionary William Carey. In addition, a few excerpts from *Assam Mission*, a collection of papers presented by missionaries at the Baptist Mission Jubilee Conference in 1886 have also been included.

3.2 Ethnography in the nineteenth century

I derive much of my understanding of ethnography from the works of Christopher Herbert who has analyzed the way nineteenth century developed and treated the study of culture. Herbert in *Culture and Anomie* (1991) writes that ethnography as a discipline of

cultural studies had just begun to become more distinct as a field of enquiry in the 1860s.⁸⁴ This was due to the colonization of Polynesian countries which created a need for the study of the new populations that had come under Britain's control. British bureaucrats and anthropologists began to take an interest in the lives and beliefs of the natives they were administering. According to Herbert, from the very beginning, ethnography produced a binary between the colonizer and the natives, where the earliest ethnographers perceived that colonized societies were "inferior" in stature as they did not have the refinement that the British middle class exhibited. The Polynesian society was seen as a system of "excess" in which basic human passions were left unregulated. Under the colonial eyes, this perceived exhibition of unbridled senses was seen as a symbol of depravity since it was in direct opposition of the British civil society. Herbert argues that the nascent discipline of ethnography found "desire" as the grounds on which it could play out its understanding of human cultures. In short, it was understood that the way a society treated "desire" determined its position in the evolutionary graph of humankind. This meant that colonized societies, with their display of unbridled passions, were inferior to the British society that had learnt to cultivate a restraint or a control on desire, thereby marking itself as a superior civilization.

Herbert goes on to elaborate that this importance of "desire" as a marker of inferior and superior civilization had its conceptualization during the evangelical revival movement that had engulfed Britain between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Under the leadership of Methodist John Wesley, the reform movement created and sustained the belief that the nature of man when left unregulated can prove dangerous. John Wesley asserted that all men were born carrying the symbols of Adam and Eve's original sin where they fell from God's grace due to their uncontrolled desires. Thus, man in his natural state exhibited "the image of the

⁸⁴ Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991.

beast, in sensual appetites and desire” (31). Wesley’s “mythology of sin” became the basis on which the fetishes of “self-control, discipline, work, ‘purity,’ resignation, self-abnegation” (32) were built in the Victorian culture under the insistence that desires had to be kept under constant scrutiny. This understanding led to the escalation of desire into a moral category in which man’s morality could be gauged through his ability to suppress the beast within. Hence, with the spread of the imagery of man as inherently fallen, the evangelist divided his nature as a “figurative imagery” into the twin category of sin and salvation. What made the situation incongruous was that while religion required docility, it also required an “intense cultivation of desires” (35) in the form of passionate worship rituals. Herbert writes that desire, both encouraged and forbidden, “must have generated as a result no small quotient of tension and ambivalence” (35). Nevertheless, by inculcating the suppression of desires as a necessary precursor to any respectable civilization, the evangelical revival created a discourse for evolutionary ethnography in which the Victorian society, with its overarching focus on self-repression, became the epitome of refined culture. Herbert, therefore, argues that society orchestrated the formation of culture by controlling desire impulses among individuals and groups. He writes that society does not serve as “an expression of immanent natural, divine, or semiological order”, but functions as “an artificial restraint imposed by necessity upon volatile, uncontrollably self-multiplying individual impulses and desires which in a state of unimpaired freedom, could any such state exist, would act without limit” (35). In other words, the formation of culture simulates the construction of individuals and exhibits itself in the form of their conduct by dictating and moulding their desire. Superior civilizations claimed to function under “social restraint” in which individuals who exhibited a heightened sense of self-control became elevated in comparison to the beasts of the wild, which in ethnography referred to colonized societies because of their unbridled natural impulses.

It was therefore discovered that human conduct, both Victorian and colonized, must not be left to its natural devices but can and should be shaped through external social forces. Herbert writes, "...human desire by its very nature is keyed to the constitutive principles of a society and acts not to disrupt but, inescapably, to express and to reinforce them" (40). Controlling desire meant that the conduct of the people had to be governed at every stage. Yet, control did not have to be oppressive or disruptive; rather it worked and still works under the guise of individual freedom or liberty to conform to such laws. "In order for desire to exist in any coherent, active, and potentially satisfiable form, it must embed itself in a fully social matrix, which is to say, become directed towards objects conventionally defined and symbolically coded as desirable by human society" (50). According to Herbert, culture is not a form of control, but a "system of desire" in which aspirations are already predetermined by the society. This power relation between society and individual desire comes to play in the act of converting a population from "heathenism" to Christianity.

3.3 The missionary as ethnographer

The missionaries' purpose of living in colonized lands was to convert the population from heathens to Christians. The process of conversion required that the missionaries first carry out extensive research on the people who are to be the subject of this transformation. Thus, American missionaries working in North-East India, much like the missionaries in the rest of the world exhibited an ardent engagement with ethnographic study. They attended weddings, visited the sick, and witnessed harvest and burial ceremonies as observers. Annette Rosentiel in an essay argues that the missionaries were the first individuals to take a scientific approach to ethnography and establish it as a discipline.⁸⁵ What this meant is that ethnographers carry

⁸⁵ Annette Rosentiel, "Anthropology and the Missionary", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Jan. - Jun., 1959), pp. 107-115.

out accurate observation and accurate recording of their subjects. Missionaries acted as ethnographers by learning the native language, keeping a record of their observations, understanding the native point of view, and indulging in ‘participant observation’ technique in which they partook of the cultural activities under study. Rosentiel opines that some missionaries such as William Carey, also promoted non-ethnocentrism.⁸⁶ She quotes Carey as writing: “The missionaries must try to understand their (the natives’) moods of thinking, their habits, their propensities, their antipathies, etc. This knowledge may be easily obtained by reading some part of their works, and by attentively observing their manners and customs” (108). According to Rosentiel, Carey emphasized the importance of the missionary being “one of the companions and equals of the people to whom he is sent” (108). That is, the missionary ought to be a living embodiment of the spirit of egalitarianism that the missions set out to achieve in the colonies.

Yet, despite Rosentiel’s insistence that the missionaries were instructed to treat the natives as equals, there seems to be a marked difference between theory and practice. Missionaries traveling to the North-East felt no affinity towards the “animists” who they deemed to be peoples without history, culture, and science. Nathan Brown, the first American Baptist missionary to reach Assam describes the Singpho tribe in the following words: “They seem to be perfect savages, entirely in the state of nature, having no books, and are even without a written character to express their own language” (118).⁸⁷ He had also earlier referred to “savages” of India as similar to those of Burma giving the impression that all hill people are

⁸⁶ William Carey (1761-1864) was an English Baptist Minister who established the Serampore College and the Serampore University in Bengal. He inspired the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in London. The American Baptist Mission held him in high regard and dedicated the establishment of their organization to him. In Sophie Bronson’s *A Century of Baptist Foreign Mission*, she describes how Carey’s influence across the missionary circles prompted the establishment of missionary societies in New England, America.

⁸⁷ Nathan Brown, *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and Other Labors of Nathan Brown*, Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers Publishers, 1890.

uncouth, “There are the Singphos, the Miris, the Mishmis, the Abors, the Nagas and other savage tribes, some of whom are in a state very similar to the Karens, and have no written language or books. Here is the spot for missionaries to go in, and sow the seed of life” (111). Other missionaries such as A. K. Gurney, who was in-charge of Sibsagor field in the 1870s and 1880s maintained that there will always be a hierarchy between them and the natives. Gurney states:

Our modes of life, habits and thoughts are different from those of the native Christian. There is a great gulf between them and us. Our position is much above them. We cannot avoid this. We cannot bring ourselves down to them or lift them up to us... The missionary in education and knowledge is far above his native brother, and he belongs to the conquering race, the English and Americans being all the same to a native.... The missionary is so great in the eyes of his native brother, and the latter feels so inferior in knowledge and wisdom that he does not feel like taking the lead when the missionary is near but instinctively waits for him. (*Assam Mission*, 119)

The reflection by Mr. Gurney exposes some of the ambivalence associated with missionaries as ethnographers where racial arrogance had to collaborate with egalitarianism to fulfil the missionary target of converting the population. The writers recorded the natives’ cultures from a vantage point of view and could not help keep up a condescending attitude towards it. Their use of realist ethnography to reach out to the reading public validated their life and work in the fields. It was based on a binary and unequal relationship of the observer and the subject.

The missionaries seem to solidify the understanding of ethnography as an “invention” of cultures where one’s own identity dictates the interpretations of alien societies. Roy Wagner

in his analysis of culture writes that in some way, an ethnographer “invents” the culture he works with as he “finds new potentialities and possibilities for the living of life” (13-14).⁸⁸ Here, “invention” does not mean that the culture did not exist prior to the ethnographer’s arrival, but that it is made “visible” by the ethnographer’s focus on its “distinctiveness” that marks it as similar or different to his own culture. Wagner declares that what the ethnographer sees as unique about different cultures stems from his “use of meanings known to him in constructing an understandable representation of his subject” (16). In short, the culture of the subject is studied through the culture of the ethnographer. Wagner briefly adds that the difference between a missionary ethnographer and a secular ethnographer falls in the realm of “relative objectivity”. The secular anthropologist, in spite of his cultural background, is supposed to “adjust” to foreign cultures and study it objectively whereas a missionary is understood to use his bafflement to view anything native as “cussedness and slovenliness, thus reinforcing their own elitist self-images” (16). As such, a missionary fails to look at native culture beyond the trappings of his own culture.

The missionary as ethnographer has therefore come under heavy scrutiny with twentieth century critics accusing them of acting as catalysts for colonization. According to James Buzard, the notion of culture that was created and sustained by Western ethnographers has been criticized for being an “essential tool for making other,” (3) where the natives are seen as appropriate subjects for cultural intervention.⁸⁹ Culture divided the native population into “readily governable thought-packets” that came handy in their “control and regulation” (4) making them complicit in the project of imperialism. J Abbink in “Anthropology and Missions: A Critical Epistemological Perspective” concurs that ethnography assumed some imperialistic

⁸⁸ Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, Revised ed., University of Chicago Press, 1981.

⁸⁹ James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

characteristics, “constituting its research objects from an external, utilitarian vantage point, and not on a shared level of analysis and commitment with the subjects studied” (224).⁹⁰ Whereas a secular anthropologist observes culture from a distance, a missionary worker wishes to “interfere” in the mechanisms of a primitive society and “recreate” it in his own image. The study of culture, therefore, became an imperial project to devise a strategy under which the otherwise “barbaric” population can be brought under western form of governance. Writing itself is a deeply political act where Western civilization in its splendour is used as a cover for imperialism.

Religious difference acted as a means for furthering the divide between the self and the other. Esme Cleall writes that missionary literature was as much about image building as it was about ethnographically studying the natives.⁹¹ Missionaries shaped a worldview where its self-identity assumed a series of binaries in which the relationship between them and the others were positioned around terminologies such as “like” from “unlike,” and “Christian” versus “heathen” (3). Racial differences included variation of “complexion, IQ, religion, language, behaviour and dress” (5) all of which pointed to the inferior nature of the colonized. These attitudes were not static and continued to find other indicators of inferiority at different points in time. The categories were formed in such a way so as to inscribe difference at the heart of colonial rule.

3.4 Ethnography as spectacle

The ethnographic inquiry into the lives of the natives of the North-East doubled as a project of self-study. The missionaries immersed themselves in playing the dual role of being

⁹⁰ J. Abbink, “Anthropology and the missions: a critical epistemological perspective”, *Methodology and Science*, 18 (4) (1985) Pages: 253-270.

⁹¹ Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Difference: Negotiating Otherness in the British Empire, 1840–1900*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

authors and subject of their narratives where a substantial portion was dedicated to the struggles associated with the propagation of white Christian culture in the colonies. The missionaries navigated the role of being writers and readers of their literature, but very importantly they were also ‘characters’ that Americans read about in their day-to-day life. This realization of being subjects of study by the masses must have dictated the way in which a missionary man or woman portrayed themselves in their writing. The writers ensured that auto-ethnography sustained a collection of spectacles where visually outstanding events marked their everyday experiences. From the missionary’s first glimpse of the Brahmaputra River carrying the floating bodies of the dead, to encountering native tribes in their finest costumes, ethnography became a collection of images that emphasized on the exotic nature of missionary work.

Guy Debord in *The Society of Spectacle* (originally published in 1968) had written how the emergence of capitalism transformed society into an “immense accumulation of spectacles” (7).⁹² According to him, what was once mediated directly through interactions between people has changed into a relationship of images and representations. People base their opinions and judgments to images being exchanged rather than striving to unravel the reality behind them. It is not that pre-capitalist societies did not create images but those images were based on external realities that could be accessed by the different individuals constituting the society. According to Debord, the present does not accord this access to reality anymore as reality is now arbitrated by mass media. As such, reality is not something that needs participation but that needs only “spectacles” to establish relationships between the different segments of society.

The connection between capital and spectacle can also be explored in the context of the nineteenth century evangelical missions. The surplus generated in the Western capitalist

⁹² Guy Debord, *The Society of Spectacle*, Trans. Ken Knabb, Rebel Press, 2005.

economy sponsored the missionary enterprise. The enterprise depended on donations from its supporters who were part of the larger capitalist economy. This created a pressure on the mission enterprise to sustain an image that could evoke the most response in the form of compassion and donations. Ethnography became the means to strengthen the missionary image-creation by presenting their lives as a series of spectacles involving the ‘Christian hero’ and the ‘noble savage’. The representation of the Christian missionary in a pith helmet, preaching under a tree, evolved into one such memorable image that became ingrained in to the public consciousness. Similarly, natives as filthy savages carrying a violent disposition, too, became a dominant justification for intervention. The taming of the savage and the success of the missionary enterprise was communicated to the readers via a series of images of destitution and progress. These interactions took place amidst different settings ranging from dense forests to crowded weekly markets. Among these collections of images, the Baptism ceremony stood out as the culmination of all their achievements in the fields. The missionaries describe in great detail the mood, setting, and purity associated with such exercises. The Baptism ceremonies became a periodic event to highlight the success of the missionary project. More importantly, it became the means by which the enterprise could be appraised in concrete terms by adding to the statistics of the conversion process.

The spectacles organized by the missionaries denied a level-playing field to the natives who did not get a platform to counter the monopoly of images. Jeffrey Cox argues that while the missionary encounter had lasting impact on both sides, the literature does not reflect these changes since it “modified and transformed and often distorted” (114) the narrative to suit the audience.⁹³ Cox has thus questioned the “reality” of these narratives and accused missionary literature of employing “defamatory synecdoche” wherein the rhetoric often selected “one or a

⁹³ Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India 1818-1940*, Stanford UP, 2002.

small number of characteristics of a foreign culture” to use it “as representative of the whole” (118). Under this scheme of writing, the missionaries emphasized on native cultural traits such as that of animal sacrifice and head-hunting as a predominant characteristic of the entire tribal society thereby maligning it as a whole. This excessive focus on a few indigenous rituals led to the creation of stereotypes that have become difficult to shake off even today. Some missionaries in the latter decades of missionary enterprise in the North-East realized the damage done to the image of the natives and tried to correct the initial biases by questioning the veracity of earlier claims. However, these latter day corrections could not become as popular probably because they lacked the spectacle associated with the othering of colonized cultures.

3.5 “The myth of boundless desire”

With Victorian society touting itself as a superior civilization, the evangelical belief in man’s fallibility or original sin found its new location among the colonized societies. Herbert, who calls it the “myth of boundless desire,” writes that colonization created a circumstance where the colonizers began to derive their own cultural identity through the study and evaluation of foreign societies. Learning about the cultures of different societies and portraying them as a system of excess became a way of establishing themselves as just the opposite. Missionaries in their travels to Polynesia, Africa and India found ample evidence of heathen immorality shaped by the latter’s “uncontrolled following of immediate desires” (60). Ethnography as a discipline began to create and sustain the Victorian image of the native as an “uneducated savage” prone to “anarchy” and “selfish restlessness” (62). This gaze continued to permeate across all aspects of native culture, from their traditional way of dressing to the maintenance of their homes to their rituals of death.

In their study of native culture, American missionaries too shared the concept of the British civilizing mission where the native ‘culture’ was denigrated for its exhibition of uncontrolled desires. The first generation of missionaries to the North-East equated native life with lawlessness, laziness, violence, and superstitions that created an urgent requirement for a civilizing mission. According to William R. Hutchinson, the nineteenth century protestant thought operated under the belief that “civilizing and Christianizing” were the two sides of the same coin and that one must invest in education and civilization before one can effectively implement evangelism (65).⁹⁴ Further Hutchison writes that the American Mission was inspired by the Puritan phrase “errand into the wilderness” that suggested a “heightened activism—the actual transporting of a message and witness to the unknown, possibly fearsome and uncivilized places” (5). In other words, the American Mission, primarily under the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), established in 1810, shared a common ideal with its European counterparts and saw civilizing missions as a pressing requirement in the face of imperialism in which the “white man’s civilization would inevitably supersede that of the less developed cultures,” (64) and even destroy it.

The adage of “Errand into the wilderness” also consolidated the image of colonized societies as savage and simplified the missionaries’ claim that in comparison, they themselves were organized, hard-working, peaceful, and reasonable. It is interesting to note that while writing about India, William Carey, the writer of *A Garo Jungle Book* highlights that among the tribe that he worked with, “the fiercest passions held sway” (6) that led them to commit terrible bloody deeds.⁹⁵ The people from the North-East were allegedly not in charge of their own emotions and were easily persuaded to violence and barbarity. Desire gets articulated at

⁹⁴ William R Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions*, University of Chicago Press, 1993.

⁹⁵ William Carey, *A Garo jungle book or the mission to the Garos of Assam*, The Judson Press, 1919.

the sites of pagan worship where it becomes a show of licentiousness through the spectacle of community animal sacrifice. The earliest missionaries consistently sustained the images of savagery and occult to drive home the point that the natives had no control over their desires.

And yet, much like Herbert's Victorian conceptions of desire, the American missionaries too, espoused a contradiction towards its treatment. Whereas they saw native desires as vulgar and uncivilized, their own desire to work among the newly colonized areas was seen as divine providence. In addition, the missionaries claimed to know the difference between two sets of desires—those that need controlling and those that need to be fulfilled. This understanding is evoked in a letter that Mrs. Brown, the first woman American missionary in Assam, wrote to her sister in America, where she says she is torn between two desires.

I sometimes have an unconquerable desire to see my friends once more before I die. But the Lord has been gracious to me; I should be very ungrateful to speak of trials and sufferings without at the same time acknowledging the goodness of the kind Hand that has so often given me support, and at times such sweet peace and consolation. As much as I desire to see you once more, I have no settled wish to give up laboring in the missionary field and return. (*Whole World Kin*, 150)

Missionary thought encouraged desire for proselytization but at the same time demanded controlling other desires that would come in the way of fulfilling the civilizing mission. The missionaries lived under trying circumstances without modern amenities and support, and lost a number of lives to sudden bouts of illness. Yet, their desire to spread Christianity made them persevere in the plains and hills of North-East, unwilling to surrender to the natives or the environment. The morality of desire, therefore, depended on the subject of its impulse. In this scheme of things, native desires were seen as dangerous and immoral as it

promoted savagery and superstition, whereas missionary desire was seen as divine. Therefore, Mrs. Brown found great happiness in noticing that after their arrival, there developed a curiosity for learning among the people: “There is a rapidly increasing desire among all classes, to learn to read; and we learn from many quarters, that a spirit of inquiry concerning this new religion exists among the people” (223). The native desire for knowledge is encouraged as it is seen as a positive impulse that will lead people to read the Bible and be persuaded to reform. This desire is also seen as a tool that will counter their ignorance and teach them the Christian way of life.

3.6 North-East and the “lack” of culture

American missionary writings seldom recognized the native lifestyle and ideology as constituting a well-established culture, choosing instead to define them as “habits” and “customs” of the hill tribes. Indeed, on several occasions in their works, the Garos and Nagas are likened to monkeys due to their flair for living in the ‘jungle lair,’ climbing trees and disappearing among the foliage at will.⁹⁶ The corresponding ethnography resorted to describing the natives under such titles as “The savage at home”, “The savage in costume and at work,” and “Savage worship and strange legends,” thereby stripping them of any sign of civilization.⁹⁷ Missionary ethnography sustained the hierarchy of the observer and the subject with a rigidity that focused on the ‘lack’ in these cultures. In the narratives, the “savage” lacked a modern home, he lacked respectable clothing, and his worship is a site of unbridled desire. Alternately, when missionaries like William Carey chose to address the natives as “men” he added the suffix “cub” to the title of his chapter “Man-cubs at school” (*Garó Jungle Book*, Table of

⁹⁶ In *A Corner in India*, Mrs. Clark worries that Naga school-children are prone to disappearing among the trees or the roof of some house at school time (8). Alternately, Carey in *A Garó Jungle Book* writes that during their resistance against the British, the Garos took to the trees like “like monkeys, still and invisible among the leaves,” (49).

⁹⁷ These are some of the chapter titles of *A Corner in India*.

Contents). It has a telling paragraph on the relationship that the British Raj, the missionaries, and the natives shared with each other. Carey writes that when the British army engaged in punitive expeditions to the hills, they sometimes brought back children as hostages to blackmail the tribes into “good behavior” (51). These boys were taught to read and write and were later on given employment. Carey notes that despite the education and job opportunities, most of these boys were “disappointments”:

Their slight introduction into the world of knowledge familiarized them more with the evil than with the good of civilized life. Many became mere hanger-on at the station, loafing about the local bazaar, drinking a deadlier liquor than their mountain *chu*, and acquiring other vices than those to which they were born. The savage had been weaned from the jungle. He had learned to don a coat and to strut about the streets; but in instinct, in passion, and in palate he was a savage still. (51-52)

The sting in Carey’s words used in describing natives is immediately soothed by a quick admission—“There were exceptions, of course, as will be seen” (52). Carey then writes about the few natives who managed to convert and stay true to the new religion. The missionary anthropologist stayed uncritical of the excesses of British expeditions in the hills and instead validated their actions by identifying the sanctity of their motives. The blame of the “savagery” in spite of the British as well as American intervention rested solely on nature of the natives themselves.

The disdain for local cultures exposed the missionaries’ refusal to recognize the existence of multiple cultures around the world. In this regard, James Buzard has highlighted the lacuna of the earliest ethnographers in identifying local cultures as “the wholeness of a particular people’s way of life” (5). Instead, the discipline fixated itself with a single yardstick

“for judging the development of human faculties” (5) based on the European model of civilization. Writing in the context of Victorian ethnography, Buzard notes that anthropology favoured a narrative in which “the evolution of human social forms and technologies, was committed to dealing with levels of human Culture— frequently written with a capital C— from primitive to advanced, and not with separate, relatively autonomous ‘cultures,’ differently evolved under different environmental conditions” (6). In other words, it was believed that there was only one culture—exemplified by British society—and different societies marked a different stage of civilization, with primitive populations at the bottom of the pyramid and the British at the helm.

Through frequent labeling of colonized societies as “savage” and “wild,” the American missionaries, too, subscribed to the concept of evolutionary anthropology in which they believed in the hierarchies of civilization. The study of local cultures served to strengthen the conviction that the natives required a guiding hand to pull them out of centuries of darkness. The missionaries sought to find inspiration in some of their successful experiences among the American aboriginals where Christianity had made a marked difference. They found similarities between the hill tribes of North-East India and the American Indians in their fetish surrounding the human skull and the human scalp respectively. They believed that just as Christianity had succeeded in reforming some sections of American natives, it would achieve an identical accomplishment among the people of North-East. In addition, it strengthened the conviction that certain management tools at the dispensation of missionaries were capable of coaxing heathens into embracing new desires. The flexibility of desire, therefore, became the grounds on which the battle of Christ and culture was fought.

3.7 Violence and occult among the natives

In order for the missionaries to modify the state of the natives, they needed to first break it down into multiple units. Among the tribes of North-East India, this translated into an intense engagement with two concepts that came under constant attack as motifs of their apparent savagery—that of the tribes’ violent temperament and that of the race’s dependence on the occult.

As soon as they arrived in the North-East, the missionaries noted that the Nagas and the Garos exhibited a tendency to resort to violence in dealing with everyday situations, unlike those of the peaceful population of the contiguous Bengal. Their narratives therefore portrayed the two “savage tribes” as operating within a cycle of lawlessness and barbarism in which they mostly stayed hidden in the inaccessible hilly ranges only to appear in the plains to raid the villages or to trade in the markets at the foothills. During the raids, the raiding team would attack a hamlet and carry back “cattle, goats and dogs and not infrequently a much prized human head,” (116) writes Mrs. Clark. The American mission harked on to this image of the natives as head-hunters in most of their ethnographic writings. They detailed the manner in which this ritual was part of the native identity and how the hill villages had homes that displayed skulls as decorative items. To the missionaries, head-hunting became a demonstration of the backwardness of hill people and a threat to the other, more civilized communities of British India. Other instances of the violent disposition of the hill tribes included the penchant for animal sacrifices at every chance, and bloody feuds among personal enemies that ended in murderous rages. Head-hunting is always referred to as a fact and norm despite Mrs. Clark and William Carey never having witnessed any such expedition during their stay. According to Tezenlo Thong, the colonizers vastly exaggerated the act of “beheading” and “decapitation” as universal forms of violence in warfare, and wilfully used a terminology

to stereotype the colonized “as more barbaric and violent than they actually were” (113).⁹⁸ Thong adds that the colonial discourse has been so popular that even Nagas themselves today believe that head-hunting was a prevalent custom whereas there is every reason to believe that such a practice would be highly impractical in those days when the population was relatively low and could not have consistently provided the number of heads that colonial narratives claimed. As for the importance of occult in their lives, William Carey in a chapter titled “The Wild Men at Home,” writes that superstitions guided the behavior of the locals at each step:

No journey can be taken unless the fates are propitious, no war engaged in without a sacrifice, no land cleared for cultivation without impaling a monkey or a goat, no marriage solemnized, or birth celebrated, or sickness tended, no experience of the coming of death to take away its victim, without the shedding of blood. (*Garó Jungle Book*, 23)

Both acts of head-hunting and the occult happened amidst uncontrolled drinking habits. Mrs. Clark and William Carey were intensely critical of the use of intoxicants among the Nagas and Garos in which every festival and every feast mandatorily included animal sacrifice and a free-flow of alcohol. Carey recalls, “When in liquor the Garos are merry to the highest pitch; men, women, and children dancing until they can scarcely stand. A birth, a marriage, a death, the opening of a market, the sitting of a council, the trial of a delinquent, almost any and every event serves as an occasion for feasting and an excuse for drink” (9). For missionaries and British bureaucrats, this unrestraint merriment and violence pushed the boundaries of native conduct towards immorality with one missionary in *Assam Mission* declaring, “The Garos are ruined by sin” (67). Here, one can see the “invention” of culture playing out between the missionary-as-ethnographer and their interpretation of the native’s lifestyle. Through their

⁹⁸ Tezenlo Thong, *Progress and Its Impact on the Nagas: A Clash of Worldviews*, Routledge, 2016.

writing, the ethnographer makes “visible” certain traits of the Nagas and Garos that to them appear distinctive due to its shock value. By contrast, the missionary sees their own culture as exemplar of peace and love, and believes that by displaying patience and suffering, he would inspire the locals into imitating the same.

In *Assam Mission*, for instance, Mr. Mason while presenting his paper titled “Methods of Mission Work” urges other missionaries to conduct themselves in “a Christ-like love” (102) so that the converts learn from their teachers how to augment their spiritual life. Some pages later, Mr. W. E. Witter calls on the missionaries to be “living examples of the Word....to exemplify God’s love for the Assamese, Garos, and Nagas by our separateness from sin and our patience with ‘the unthankful and the evil’” (153). The American missionaries identified native life as synonymous with sin and evil with no room for subtleties. Such a stance highlighted their own role as accomplices in establishing a British government in the North-East. Their ethnography reinforced and supported the official narrative that natives were “incorrigible savages,” making it convenient for the British to annex all hill territories to maintain peace and order.

And yet, the bureaucrats were aware that long-lasting peace would only come with cultural reformation, that is, if the wild desires of the savages are curbed through a culture of restraint. To this end, the government sought the help of missionaries in silencing dissent. E. G. Philips notes, “Government has not been slow to see, as the Chief Commissioner put it in his Resolution on the Educational Report for Assam of 1881-82, that ‘it is difficult to convince a Garo or a Khasia...of the advantage of learning. The only lever that has been found effective is that of religion’” (*Assam Mission* 67-68). Hence, the government handed over the management of schools entirely to the missionaries in the hopes that they would be able to

tame the savages. The Christian religion was seen as a tool that would modify the conduct of its converts by dismantling its dependence on violence and occult.

3.8 Towards a new symbolic order

Clifford Geertz writes that culture functions within the gambit of semiotics where conduct is dictated by the meaning it produces. He argues that culture is not “an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5).⁹⁹ To produce this meaning requires that members of a community be aware of the relationship between action and its many interpretations. Geertz explains his idea by citing the difference between a “wink” and a “twitch,” both of which are “identical movements” but which have vastly different connotations. A “wink” as a conduct is an act of communication “in a quite precise and special way,” in which there is a signifier, a sign and a recipient who is part of “an already understood code.” A twitch, on the other hand has no secondary function.

Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal is winking. That’s all there is to it: a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and voila!—a gesture. (6)

Human behavior is therefore a “symbolic action” which is shared by members of his community so that communication can take place, and while “winking” is one of the simpler examples of it, any culture is a cauldron of “texts” that constitute “webs of significance.” Thus Geertz sums up culture as “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes towards life”

⁹⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books Inc, 1973.

(89). Human actions, therefore, create meanings that can be understood by people sharing the same symbolic world.

Keeping this in mind one can witness how an action creates two different interpretations for two sets of cultures. Head-hunting as an act is perceived as barbaric and wild by the missionaries, but among the tribal communities themselves, it served as a sign of masculinity. Mrs. Clark writes that as much as the raids by Nagas contributed as an additional source of income, the act of killing and taking the heads of the fallen enemies was linked with masculine pride and played a catalyst in men-women relationships. “Men were dubbed women or cows until they had contributed to the village skull-house. Young maidens instigated their betrothed to this bloody work, and it was woman’s voice that trilled the cry of victory when these prizes reeking in blood were brought into the village,” (*A Corner in India*, 47) Mrs. Clark writes. A Naga man’s worth and a Naga village’s honor were tied to the number of skulls that the community had managed to extract from other settlements.

Similarly, among the Garos, head-hunting served to create bonhomie among its different members as a form of group activity. In *A Garo Jungle Book* Carey notes that the Garos “won an evil reputation of murderous raids” and routinely massacred the landholders of the plains for material gains. On their return journey from a triumphant plunder, the tribesmen would collect the “reeking heads; and filling these with wine and food, would eat, drink, and dance, chanting songs of triumph” (11). Head-hunting, as a cultural behavior, was symbolic of community prowess and therefore contributed to the social status of these tribes as an inseparable part of their identity. Nonetheless, the British government was critical of this activity and tried to ban it as early as 1822. However, the practice continued undeterred for many decades till missionary presence in the hills put a stop to it by changing the symbolism associated with this conduct.

A telling instance of this is narrated in *A Corner in India* where we witness a change in the factors that determined the making of a desirable youth, where the desirability shifts from his prowess in the battlefield to his aptitude in embracing the tenets of Christian civilization. It started with a native Assamese preacher, Zilli, guiding the young men of Molung into embracing the Gospel. At first, only one youth was attracted to the new religion. But, that single young man was soon able to influence a friend and bring him to Christ. The following excerpt from a letter by Mrs. Clark records how Christianity sowed its seeds in the new village:

A religious and social reform has been quietly going on at Molung, beginning with a young man, who, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and helped by Assamese teacher Zilli, laid hold of one of his companions, and by persistent, prayerful effort brought him to Christ. Here were now two promising young men, the pick of the village, educated in the school, one, the son of our most influential village official, and the hearts of both filled with the love of Jesus, and set for the defense of his kingdom and social purity.... One after another of the young people were pressed into the ranks, and the White Ribbon Society, without the name, or buttonholes in which to wear the badge, grew in numbers and influence and power. (138)

Some pages later, Mrs. Clark writes that these boys were members of the Training School run by missionaries where they prepared “young men for pastors, evangelists and day school teachers”. Meanwhile, young women were trained “to be suitable wives for such men” (148).

The above account of missionary activity among the Naga youth highlights the fact that the manly pride associated with head-hunting was slowly replaced by a pride in being Christian where embracing the new religion became synonymous with literacy, rationality, and

modernity. According to Mrs. Clark, the heathen young men would spend their evenings “singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation,” whereas the educated young men who had built a separate dormitory could be heard praying and singing songs of praise (138). In the latter accommodation, “purity and holiness” reigned, remarks Mrs. Clark, thus dividing actions into the categories of moral and immoral in which the heathen populace, with its inability to control its vulgarity became subordinate to the new Christian population that had begun to curb their savage instincts. The converted young men, raised in mission schools, no longer subscribed to the idea of head-hunting as a pre-requisite for masculinity. Instead, their aptitude in studies and scriptures made them eligible bachelors among their communities.

3.9 Conclusion

In attempting to replace tribal societies with Christian ones, the missionaries prepared the ground for a modern governance to take shape. The “myth of boundless desire” was an ethnographic creation that was used to classify the world population into civilized and uncivilized. This myth rested upon the belief that civilized populations of Europe and America had developed self-control over their basic, animalistic, dangerous impulses whereas uncivilized people of the colonies had not, thereby making the latter “wild” and “savage”. The American civilizing mission declared itself an enterprise of ‘love and peace’ and attempted to develop self-control among the peoples of the North-East so they would rein in their impulses for violence and the occult. At the same time, the mission promoted new desires that it believed were important to the spread, acceptance and practice of Christianity—a desire for learning, a desire for peaceful coexistence, a desire for a new religion, and a desire for a shared language. In other words, the American Baptist Mission did not annihilate “desire” but changed its course among the peoples of the North-East.

Chapter 4

The Christian Pastorate and the Birth of a Population

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Naga Hills, Garo Hills and other parts of North-East India had begun to witness the emergence of a Christian population who could be distinguished from their heathen brethren by their conduct. The new Christian population was school educated, followed the teachings of the Bible, and shunned former 'primitive' rituals. Missionaries in their works divided the natives into two sections—the heathen populace with their desires for violence and occult, and the rapidly increasing Christian populace, who according to the missionaries, exhibited Christian virtues of peace and faith. In doing so, missionary memoirs recorded the formation of the modern category of 'population' as a concept and practice that shadowed the making of a colonial state.

This chapter continues with the study of ethnographic narratives on the North-East and analyzes the outcome of the missionary enterprises' dedicated work on managing the conduct of the people. I argue that Christianity set up the stage for drastic changes as the nation began to take shape. The chapter examines the journal entries and letters of missionaries stationed at Assam and Manipur. Nathan Brown and wife Eliza Brown were the first missionary couple to go to Assam. Their journals, magazine reports, and letters have been compiled into *The Whole World Kin* (1890). In Manipur, the earliest missionary was William Pettigrew whose mission reports have been collected and published by Rev. Jonah M. Solo under *Forty Year Mission in Manipur: Mission Reports of Rev. William Pettigrew* (2006). These reports were originally written from 1894 to 1934 and were published in The Baptist Missionary Magazine.

The unification of different tribes began soon after the British established its administration in the area. The new administration began to fuse together different communities, uniting them either according to their tribal names or according to their areas of

residence—Garos, Mizos, Mikirs, Nagas, and Khasis, to name a few. Some of these identities—the Nagas and the Abors—were a Western construct where the British administrators and the missionaries borrowed terminologies from the valley locals and used them to identify the hill dwellers. According to Tezenlo Thong, there was no composite Naga identity before the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ The identity evolved through a historical and cultural process where the distinct tribes, having more than thirty dialects, were consistently fused together in the quest for a commonality that would make it easier to govern them. He writes, “Just like the term ‘India’ was coined by the imperial power for administrative convenience, the colonial administration created, if not adopted, the collective term “Nagas” as a colonial necessity” (78). Similarly, the Abor tribe of present day Arunachal Pradesh owe their nomenclature to the Assamese classification for people living in the hills surrounding Brahmaputra Valley. According to Jayeeta Sharma, the categories of ‘Nagas’ and ‘Abors’ were reserved for frontier tribes “denoted naked and rude” (58).¹⁰¹ Till the arrival of the British these labels were flexible, but from nineteenth century onwards the classification were assimilated by the British and made official.

Another feature of the hill dwellers was that before the arrival of the westerners, they had never been united under one sovereign. The valleys and hills were inhabited by groups of numerous tribes, each living independently in villages and hamlets owing little allegiance to one another. Hoineilhing Sitlhou writes that till the nineteenth century, “the primary units of identity were clan, family or small groups of villages as in the Khasi states...each village had

¹⁰⁰ Tezenlo Thong, *Colonization, Proselytization, and Identity: The Nagas and Westernization in Northeast India*, Springer Nature, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire’s Garden: Assam and the Making of India*, Duke University Press, 2011.

its own culture and, often, its own religion.”¹⁰² In addition, unlike other parts of India where communities shared the linguistic patterns of its neighbours, in the North-East each tribe spoke a completely different dialect. Yet in spite of the differences in language, worship, and culture, the British and later on the American missionaries made way for a united community that would be recognized as North-Eastern Indians. The works by American missionaries record the transition of scattered inhabitants into becoming a ‘population’ in consonance with the modern understanding of governance, or what Michel Foucault calls “governmentality.”

4.1 Population as a modern category

Michel Foucault argues that the modern state-making phenomenon is defined by its creation of population as the subject of governance. In *Security, Territory, and Population*, a collection of his lectures delivered at College de France between 1977 and 1978, Foucault draws attention to how “population” as a concept and phenomenon underwent a change from the classical times to the modern times, roughly between seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.¹⁰³ According to him, from classical times, population symbolized the power of the sovereignty who ruled over a certain territory. “A large population, population that could thus appear on the blazon of a sovereign’s power, made its presence felt by the fact that it provided many troops, that the towns were populated, and that the markets were busy” (96). However, a shift happened in the seventeenth century and eighteenth century when population, rather than being a symbol of sovereign power, was seen as a collective to be regulated so it could function at its optimal capacity and contribute to the state. This meant that a population was treated as a “set of processes to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes”

¹⁰² Hoineilhing Sitlhou, “Straying beyond Conquest and Emancipation: Exploring the Fault lines of Missionary Education in North East India,” *Indian Anthropologist* Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Jan - Dec 2009), pp. 65-84.

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-78*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

(98). Population as a “natural phenomenon,” therefore, was no longer just the “juridical-political notion of subject” of a sovereign but the “technical-political object of management and government” (98). In other words, the purpose of modern government became the governance of a population so that the individuals comprising the whole conduct themselves in ways that would be conducive to the state. Foucault introduced the concept of “governmentality” to connote the mechanisms of power that operate on a population. He writes:

First, by “governmentality” I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by “governmentality” I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power –sovereignty, discipline, and so on – of the type of power that we can call “government” and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, [and, on the other]† to the development of a series of knowledges (*savoirs*). Finally, by “governmentality” I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually “governmentalized”. (144)

Foucault believed “governmentality” fixed its focus primarily on the management of the population rather than on the Machiavellian fixation with the sovereign’s rule. As a result,

the technologies of power are aimed towards managing the “conduct” of individuals constituting the population by directing the things it desires and ought to desire. He cites the concept of ‘security’ as one of the technologies of power that determine the conduct of the people. In his case study of smallpox inoculation in the eighteenth century, Foucault writes how the government issued various techniques in order to control the disease. This included survey of hospitals and patients to find out “how many people are infected with smallpox, at what age, with what effects, with what mortality rate, lesions or aftereffects, the risks of inoculation, the probability of an individual dying or being infected by smallpox despite inoculation, and the statistical effects on the population in general” (24). They carried out “medical campaigns that try to halt epidemic or endemic phenomena” (25) and focused on particular needs of specific areas in order to resolve the problem. Thus, by turning the population into a series of statistics, the government managed to control a dreadful disease from taking more lives. Foucault calls this management of the life of the population as “biopower” and the “series of interventions and regulatory controls” as “biopolitics” (139). Biopower refers to the techniques of management in which the state draws information about its populace through surveys and studies to come up with measures best suited to manage them.

Apart from techniques of security, Foucault in his earlier work, *Discipline and Punish* (first published in 1975), also draws attention to technologies of ‘discipline’ through which individual bodies are managed. While ‘security’ is targeted at the population as a whole, ‘discipline’ singles out the separate individuals comprising this population and acts on these bodies. This technology of management is implemented through institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools to make the bodies of people “docile” by making them follow the same routine over and over again on a daily basis. This method of management differed from earlier times when sovereigns used brute force to manage its subjects. Discipline, in contrast, works by organizing spaces, time and routine activities. For example, classrooms are confined areas

accessible only to certain individuals and are built in such a way as to give localized space to every user after dividing them into sections, class, and subjects. Classrooms become the means through which a teacher can supervise an individual and a group at the same time. Similarly, a prison has “cells” designated for individual bodies that could be supervised by the prison officials. Time in these spaces are regularized, i.e. the individuals are required to follow the time tables related to their everyday designated activities, even that of rest, called recess. As such the main purpose of disciplinary measures is to “transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities” (148).¹⁰⁴ Discipline makes individuals more docile to power through mechanized living where each activity is constantly supervised and monitored. Thus, an important component of discipline is ‘surveillance’ where students, patients and prisoners are supervised at all times by teachers, doctors, and prison officials. Foucault introduces the concept of the Panopticon which he developed from the works of Jeremy Bentham. It is a theory which finds a correlation between modern governance and constant surveillance by imagining a tower in a jail that is surrounded by a building with jail cells. The tower shelters guards and from their vantage point, the guards can see every cell laid out around them. Due to the way it is constructed though, the cell mates cannot see the guards, and they do not know whether the guards are monitoring them or not. The inmates therefore by default assume that they are being monitored at all times. This arrangement automates power and “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility” (201). This theory is applied to surveillance in society where various organizations are keeping constant vigils on the conduct of individuals. Foucault argues that modern society is a “disciplinary society,” meaning that power in modern times is largely exercised through disciplinary means in a variety of institutions. He notes that modern society is marked by a system of power which

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995 edition.

creates a more docile population by employing techniques that have a direct access to human bodies. Like Herbert, Foucault argues that conduct is determined by desire that he defines as “the pursuit of the individual’s interest” (101), claiming that every individual “acts out of desire” (101). He adds that this desire, which appears to be very natural, is open to certain mechanisms of power through which it can be moulded and shaped.

4.2 The Christian pastorate and the tenets of pastoral power

The concept of bio-power was first formulated by the Christian pastorate many centuries before it metamorphosed into a modern form of governance. According to Foucault, what constitutes the state-population relationship today is a derivative of the shepherd-flock metaphor that is at the heart of the Christian pastorate. Modern governance, with its focus on the management of the population, borrows from the system embedded in Christianity where the pastor is in charge of managing his flock. In order to understand the management of population, therefore, the phenomenon needs to be studied not just as statistics of individuals living in an area, both theological and secular, but also as the set of people who are being appraised, evaluated and “watched” by first the shepherd and then the state.

Pastoral power functions through the incorporation of the pastor and his flock in an intimate relationship of management where the former is entrusted with the care of his sheep. The pastor has to devise a series of security and disciplinary measures to ensure the survival and functioning of all the individual sheep and the flock. This means that he supervises the flock around the clock, ensures their well-being and surveys the movement of the individual sheep to ensure they are not lost. As a pastor, the shepherd “sees to it that the sheep do not suffer, it goes in search of those that have strayed off course, and it treats those that are injured” (172). In the process, what we essentially witness is the concept of “pastoral power” which is the “power of care” or of management. The pastor is not a “striking display of power and

superiority” but a watchful presence that “will see to it that things are best for each of the animals of his flock” (173). In what Ben Golder terms as “fundamentally beneficent power,” the relationship of the pastor and the flock is based on the understanding that the former will not only take care of every individual sheep but also the group as a whole.¹⁰⁵ This is what Foucault calls “the paradox of the shepherd” where the individual and the whole can lead to a situation where the pastor may have to sacrifice “one for all,” or “all for one, which will be at the absolute heart of the Christian problematic of the pastorate” (174). Modern state techniques of security and discipline incorporate this individualizing yet totalizing aspect of pastor-flock relationship. Whereas the flock is managed as a whole, each sheep is also supervised separately to ensure optimum performance.

4.3 The conduct of conduct

The end result of a combination of ‘security’ and ‘discipline’ techniques is the conduct or “possibilities of action” of the individual subject. Much like how Herbert insists that desire is never impersonal and free from influence, Foucault too, asserts that desire is an impulse that can be created and shaped through security and discipline and can be spread from an individual to an entire population. He further writes that government is always an attempt to “act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (221).¹⁰⁶ What it means is that modern governance is characterized by “conduct of conduct” which contains several word plays. Daniele Lorenzini writes that governmentality creates tension between its several dimensions—“to conduct someone, to (let

¹⁰⁵ Ben Golder “Foucault and the Genealogy of Pastoral Power”, *Radical Philosophy*. 10. 2 (2007): 157-176

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

oneself) be conducted, to conduct oneself".¹⁰⁷ In other words, the policies of a modern government are marked by its implementation in the form of conduct. Governmentality arranges things in such a way through schools, colleges, and the media that people conduct as directed, in pursuit of their own self-interest without the need for brute application of force.

4.4 Population in North-East India

Mrs. Brown in *The Whole World Kin* was one of the first missionaries to allude to the way population had begun to emerge in Assam. The narrative, compiled by her, weaves together letters, diary entries, Baptist Missionary Magazine extracts, "family traditions" and "memories" to create a realistic portrayal of the life of a missionary family alone in the wilderness, persevering on the conviction that they would be agents of change. Towards the end of their sixteen years stay in Assam, Mrs. Brown refers to what that change has been about—the creation of a new community that would conduct itself according to the teachings of Christianity.

In 1851, Mr. Brown observed that there had been a slow but definite development of Western etiquette and Christian lifestyle among the converts. The changes thus witnessed its high point that year when missionaries and converts jointly celebrated the English New Year with a dinner at a convert's home. Mr. Brown declares, "Thus, Christian families and a Christian social life had been established" (383). The small community of locals around her had begun to read and write, the women had begun to dress neatly and evening prayers had become routine. When the missionaries returned from their boat trips to other stations, this tiny bunch of Christians would gather at the riverside to welcome them back. The Browns had managed to create a new population who had left their local identities as Hindus and Muslims and chosen

¹⁰⁷ Daniele Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much," *Foucault Studies*, No. 21, June 2016.

a more global identity that imitated the American missionaries. Over the next few decades, this identity kept growing as it moved from the valley, where it had limited success, and travelled to the animist hill communities where a major upheaval was witnessed.

The nascent Christian population becomes the symbolic “flock” to be governed by the pastor or the shepherd. This meant that many different native groups needed to be glued together to form the fabric on which the new religion could weave itself in. The forging of the Assamese population, based on their new-found Christianity became the first step towards the creation of a pastorate where the pastor could take charge of a flock and ensure optimum management of the members.

4.5 A society under surveillance

Missionary writings addressed the technologies of discipline as articulated by Foucault in his works on population. A particular paper titled “Methods of Mission Work” by Rev. M.C Mason (*Assam Mission*, 98), enumerate guidelines bearing a striking resemblance to the concept of state surveillance. He writes that a good missionary makes personal visits to every household in the area to learn about the people in great detail. He writes, “...As one of our first duties, we (should) become acquainted with our field; that as far as practical we traverse it, that we may know the habits, customs, beliefs, prejudices and labors of the people” (103).

This particular phrase is significant in more ways than one. In referring to the jurisdiction as a “field”, he is objectifying the Northeast as a ground for the civilizing mission. At the same time he is also creating a metaphor for the shepherd and the flock, which stays as an important component throughout the work. A “field” is where the flock conducts its activity and the shepherd oversees this activity from close proximity. As a shepherd, the missionary has to keep an eye on what they eat, how they interact, what they look like, what they sound like, what they wear, etc. among many other factors. In such “fields,” he also has to learn the

local dialects in order to broaden his understanding and introduce other forms of disciplinary measures.

This beginning of governance required a process of surveillance where the missionaries acted as the overseer to manage the population. This was done through frequent expeditions where the missionary men and women journeyed into the forests and visited small hamlets and villages that fell on the way. These visitations acquainted the missionaries with village life and also built up the need for a population that would function in accordance with Christian values. Every village that the missionaries visited introduced them to communities filled with “domestic and social miseries of heathenism” where the natural geographical beauty was offset with discord of all kinds. Surveillance thus began with taking stock of the heathen population and then evolved into making registers of those who converted after coming in contact with the missionaries. Proper management required a judicious record of all the missionary activities in the area. Thus from the time Nathan Brown arrived in Assam in 1836, there was a consistent attempt to map the land and number the people. The missionary board created an archive of the number of fields, the number of converts, and the number of children enrolled in schools. The indexes of most missionary works contain statistical data of missionary work in the area. It is not surprising that the missionary, in his role as the shepherd, built mission bungalows at the peaks of the hills so they had an uninterrupted view of the residents around them.

Other modes of surveillance included Sunday worship, daily evening prayers, and schools where the flock was expected to exhibit a refined conduct. The missionaries kept a close eye on the native behaviour during these processes. In *The Whole World Kin...* Nathan Brown in a chapter titled “A Missionary Pastorate” notes that the missionary served as a guide, a father figure, and a shepherd to the members of the field. It is his job to be “familiar with their temporal as well as spiritual needs” (331). The Browns conducted regular church prayer

meetings where they listened to the confession of the locals and gave counsel. These exchanges proved to be a very productive indicator of how well the pastorate was being managed. The couple recorded the number of people who attended these meetings and also scoured for particularly devout members who would prove to be a great addition to the church membership.

As a shepherd, the pastor could never rest from his duty of overseeing the flock. Eliza Brown notes, “A pastor’s study was always open to inquirers; quill and manuscript were at any time gladly pushed aside for a friendly, earnest talk with native visitors” (335). These meetings gave the missionaries ample opportunities to observe the various sections of people and learn the ideas that dictate their outlook on life and religion. No native could leave such meetings without a sermon that countered their existing beliefs and questioned their source of worship. This served two technical purposes. First, it allowed the missionaries to gauge the population that they were trying to consolidate, and second, it helped them prepare a list of remedies that would target the specific malady of the natives. An additional outcome of this kind of organizational structure was that it strengthened the gender and racial hierarchy at the heart of the missionary enterprise. According to Catherine Hall, the Baptist Missionary Society was patriarchal in nature in which men were entrusted with all formal responsibilities.¹⁰⁸ The concept of the missionary man as a “father figure,” attested by Mr. Brown, puts the white missionary man in a position of power over the flock. They received all the accolades and recognition whereas the wives had to make do with a congratulatory note as a loyal companion.

4.6 Overcoming the vices

In *Forty Year Mission in Manipur*, Mr. Pettigrew records his experience of setting up a Christian village among the Tankhul Nagas at Ukrul, Manipur. The missionary couple built a

¹⁰⁸ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, Polity, 2002.

station in 1896 to extend their civilizing mission among Nagas who lived in the hills and the Manipuris who inhabited the valleys. There are several reports by Pettigrew in which he studies the culture in great detail. There is one titled “Itinerating in the Tankhul Naga Country, Assam, India” written in 1907 and another titled “Burial Customs among the Tankhul Nagas” written in 1909 in which Pettigrew writes about the history and the rituals of the tribe. The observations gave him an insight into the lives of the people and also helped him strategize on managing the conduct of the people. One such area was that of abstaining from heathen ceremonies that involved sacrificing animals, and then indulging in drinking during the burial rituals. In the report on burial customs, Pettigrew gives a step-by-step account of the traditions involved after the death of a person. He describes every ritual in detail and conjures elements of superstition and uncontrolled drinking. Hence, as a Christian pastor, he comments at the end of the report that the burial ceremony is a testimony to the excesses of native culture. He writes, “In the majority of cases when the husband and father dies, rice are sold (sic) and houses as well, debts are incurred, and one can imagine how disastrous is the result in case of the wife with children,” (56). Like other missionaries, Pettigrew’s ethnography forms the foundation for change. He needs to change desires among the people and lead them to proselytization.

The beginning of their stay witnessed frantic building of the mission bungalow, the church, the school, and the out-houses that would be the new dwelling of the natives who shifted there from nearby villages. Their arrival coincided with an outbreak of cholera in the region where in 1898, hundreds of people had died in the villages. The missionary helped out many of the patients by giving them modern medicine and saving their lives. As such a community began to emerge who believed more in Pettigrew than the local shaman in his ability to cure health problems.

Alongside the construction work, the missionaries kept a close eye on the people surrounding them and also established a new time-table that would dictate life in Ukrul. First, the population was divided into young and old in which the former found their way into the missionary school where they were taught English, Geography, Mathematics, and the Bible. The older generation, on the other hand, was increasingly encouraged to give up intoxicants and dedicate a portion of their day to prayers and sermons.

From the beginning, the Pettigrews made it clear that true Christianity could be imbibed only if natives gave up all forms of intoxicants such as tobacco, opium, and rice beer. Mr. Pettigrew writes that in the initial years, Tankhul Naga culture was intrinsically linked to their habits of lying and cheating: “Manipur is far worse than any of the hill tribes-a fact which Government officials declare often.... The Manipuri is reckoned a liar, but these Tankhul Nagas can beat him. The missionary has not come across one yet whose words or actions can be fully relied upon” (14). Pettigrew establishes that drinking was part of the cultural life of the Nagas and was used as “gifts” to white officials to gain favours.

Over the years the Tankhul Nagas and a few Manipuris consented to recognizing Christian spaces as zones of discipline where they must abide by fixed rules and regulations. Even the Naga girl who worked as a nanny to the Pettigrew children informed them that after spending time with them, she does not drink now “for she knows it is not liked,” (14). Governmentality operates by modifying desires and therefore conduct. Power operates at a level where knowledge can produce subjects. The knowledge of the Tankhuls and the Manipuris are meticulously gathered by the mission as well as the government to formulate means of discipline and security to ensure that conduct is multiplied from one sheep to encapsulate the whole flock. Smaller villages with very different cultures and way of life are

inculcated with the same requirements of gentility. It has to do with creating a “herd” that needs to be managed.

In governmentality, power is not always repressive but is expected to be normative. Repressive power is the one where people are “forced” to exhibit certain behaviours for fear of punishment. For instance, the looting of villages located at the foothills by hill folks was a punishable offence. Missionaries, however, focussed on self-regulation where behaviours are changed through self-surveillance. Drinking, for instance did not come with physical punishment, but abstinence was the expected behaviour. We will analyze the modes of power prevalent in creating a new “normalcy” among the tribes in the next section.

4.7 Forms of disciplinary power implemented in the North-East

The missionaries consolidated the population of North-East India with the tacit support of the British administration. The British forces led expeditions to conquer newer forests and hills and then handed them over to the missionaries to monitor. Surveillance necessitated that there were an adequate number of observers to carry out the duties and so over the years more missionaries kept joining the enterprise and the British Administration made adequate arrangements to accommodate them. In other words, both enterprises relied on one another, as E. G. Philips elaborates, “...in 1967, the Chief Commissioner of the Province pronounced them “blood-thirsty savages,” “most-desperate and incorrigible,” and expressed what seemed to him a precarious hope that the work of our Society among them might meet with success” (*Assam Mission*, 54)

When the missionaries entered the Northeast, they had to find a way to regulate the “savage tribes” and create a hegemonic relation where the population, rather than seeing them as enemies and usurpers, had to find the new culture and religion desirable. Two policies were implemented that had a far-reaching impact on the way bio-power took over the management

of the colonized people. First, the medical work of the missionaries gave them power over a large section of people, and second, the mission schools gave them adequate space for disciplining the bodies. By studying the people through these two institutions, the missionary enterprise created a new norm or normalcy.

Normalcy refers to conduct that is expected of a population. It has to fit a norm that makes it convenient to manage the people. Parameters such as what a person should wear, what age they must join school, how much they should pay for hospital admissions etc are all decided through the norm formulated through surveillance. Norm is only possible in reference to a group, which is why population as a motif is so important to colonized regions. Mr. Pettigrew proudly reminisces over his success in consolidating a “herd” in Manipur in his report written in 1934 titled “Forty Years in Manipur, Assam: An Account of the Work of Rev. and Mrs. William Pettigrew” (80). He writes that while the first five years of his stay involved preparing the ground for the mission, his earliest success was in 1901 when he baptized 12 boys. Gradually, by 1920, “the church membership had increased to 546 with seventeen groups of Christians... In 1923 the Baptisms were 1018,” pointing towards a rapid rise in the herd. The same chapter discusses education and medical work in that order of importance and highlights the nature of pastoral power which is obtained through service rather than sovereign power of punishment.

Pettigrew writes that setting up schools in Manipur created a body of Christian workers who went to the interiors to preach the Gospel. These educated young men and women also became teachers after they passed class VI. The state benefitted much from the new tribe as they served the administration as “graduates or former students of these two schools became clerks, messengers, vaccinators, road overseers and supervisors. Others who had graduated from High School, now hold important offices in the state” (88). It is this outcome of setting up schools that points at how bodies are managed through disciplinary power which is

exercised through surveillance and knowledge. From missionary schools emerged hundreds of students who wore clothes different from their ancestors and for whom a government job was a desirable option in life. Foucault's concept of the Panopticon addresses the importance of gaze in institutions of discipline because it shows that it is not necessary to watch people constantly. Over time, people will regulate themselves even under the assumption that they are being watched. The gaze gives people the feeling that they are under surveillance and thus regiment their conduct.

This power is so pervasive that the herd begins to undergo a change towards fulfilling the expectations of improvement and progress. They internalize the shift towards Western living and ideals as it is the right thing to do. This is encapsulated in a letter written to Pettigrew by some Tangkhul Naga students in which they write, "More than anyone else at the risk of his own life, he has lifted the Tangkhul from rude half-clad savages to the present state. The Tangkhul Christians' indebtedness to him cannot be expressed in words" (99). Disciplinary power is implemented directly on the body in the form of regimented lives in schools and hospitals where timings are fixed.

According to Foucault, however, this power is implemented on everyone. Just as there are "normal" behaviours expected of the natives, there are particular behaviours expected of the missionaries as well. The American Baptist mission carried with it certain tenets of an ideal missionary. They had to be morally upright, self-sacrificing, and be result-oriented. These expectations manifested themselves in the normal behaviours of the missionaries themselves. According to Foucault, power does not just flow from the oppressor to the oppressed but that it is everywhere. It follows that scientific knowledge is the source of this power.

While this is done by the pastorate by working towards the emergence of the good Christian, the state gains the same objective through the making of the good citizen. But while

the pastorate does it through subtle methods, the state's power operates in many cases through the most potent form of punishment. Surveillance becomes a constant element of the individuals were state forces as well as the self becomes the observer and discipliner for smoother governance. What is interesting is that once the self begins to surveil itself, the conduct becomes a regular part of one's day to day life and need not be brought under rule. The government or the missionaries had made no punishable rule in order to coerce the natives to start wearing Western clothes but through a gradual internalization of what it means to be a good Christian, such changes were incorporated over time. Power was however not stagnant. A student going astray, a small heathen ritual, and a swig of local beer could dismantle the power dynamics and prove that resistance is possible. In a report written for The Assam Baptist Missionary Conference, 1910, Pettigrew laments that some members of the Christian community had partaken of the heathen funeral feast called "Kathi Kasham" or "the soul departure feast" thereby breaking the church and cementing the view that "the missionary has not come across one yet whose words or actions can be fully relied upon" (57). Yet through dedicated work of knowledge consolidation through schools and hospitals, the number of Christians was in the thousands when Pettigrew retired in 1934.

Arkotong Longkumer in his analysis of educational policies among the Nagas argues that the mission immediately realized that if evangelism was to succeed, it had to first cultivate the minds of the people.¹⁰⁹ Thus missionary Nathan Brown prepared the *Report of the Committee on Schools* in 1853 to frame an education policy in which it suggested that schools be established for the "training of future pastors and teachers' and that only Christians should be employed as teachers with Christian books and daily observance of religious services" (3).

¹⁰⁹ Arkotong Longkumer, "Along Kingdom's Highway: the proliferation of Christianity, education, and print amongst the Nagas in Northeast India", *Contemporary South Asia*, 2018.

Longkumer adds that the ABFMS was channeled by the belief that “prominence of the mind and the cultivation of reason” must precede any attempt at conversion. The human mind “had to be shaped through an emphasis on education, which would ‘eventually lead to the vindication of Christian truth’” (3). Thus, American missionaries wasted no time in establishing schools and enrolling native boys and girls. Soon enough, the results began to show in the shape of young men and women who had begun to reflect upon the two cultures under whose shadow they had grown up—their traditional heathen culture and the western culture—and who now realized that they were more compatible with the new Christian teachings. Hence, some of the first male pupils of missionary schools were also its first converts. In this context, missionary ethnography of Pettigrew spends a large chunk of its narration on his efforts in providing modern medical care in Manipur and specifically wooing people into visiting the dispensary he set up.

In his analysis, Longkumer adds that education also sowed the seeds for nationalism among the different tribes of the North-East by giving them a common Roman script. The missionaries rapidly learnt the local languages, prepared them in Roman script and went about translating the Bible. At the same time, it taught English at its schools so that the students could access the translations in their own vernacular. In spite of being a multi-lingual people, the Roman script was common to all, as was English education. Longkumer writes, “Christian conversion, education, and nationalism – was a vital centripetal force that fostered an ‘imagined community’ that brought together disparate tribes under two institutional centres: the school and the church” (9). He argues that sharing a common script consolidated the different tribes and made way for the creation of Naga identity that would later on culminate in a Naga nationalist movement.

In addition, it created an acceptance towards the modification of conduct and rapidly brought about changes in the social and cultural fabric. Robert Frykenberg in his essay on Christianity among Nagas writes, “Literacy in their own mother tongue, together with literacy in English as second language (and Assamese as a third), was like cultural dynamite. When whole villages became literate, this dynamite exploded, catapulting Nagas from the stone age into the modern world” (434).¹¹⁰ This change could be witnessed from the fact that the Nagas stopped organizing expensive rituals, warfare, head-hunting, and blood offerings.

4.8 Conclusion

The making and unmaking of desire at a mass level is a distinguishing feature of modern governance. The evangelical discourse surrounding desire helped give birth to a new population that was Christian in its beliefs and conduct. The converts had begun to dress modestly, had surrendered many of their traditional rituals, and were rapidly becoming a literate community. The changes were brought about by missionary ethnography’s discursive construction of a native population that unfolded on two levels. At one level, it constructed the ‘heathen people’ who the missions sought to convert into Christianity. It paid careful attention to record and disseminate detailed reports on social and religious practices, which helped constitute the natives as heathen. On the other level, it also constructed the ‘civilized people’ who were produced through the evangelical labor of the missionaries. This division allowed the evolution of the modern category of population in which ethnography recorded the way in which technologies of discipline and security played out in North-East India.

¹¹⁰ Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2008.

Chapter 5

Imagining a Geography and Realizing a Territory

When foreign missionaries first arrived to parts of North-East, they operated in spaces that were yet untouched by many of the markings of the nation state. The concept of territory as a fixed area under the rule of a sovereign was one such feature that was alien to many indigenous groups. Whereas kingdoms such as Tripura, Manipur, and parts of Assam had centuries of feudalism to define the people's relationship with a central authority, the missionaries found out that at most other places, governance operated on a micro level where a village or a set of villages constituted a form of fraternal bond. Their boundaries were fluid and the settlements temporary. Many communities practiced shifting cultivation in which they established a farm on one of the hills for a few years and then uprooted their settlement to shift to a new location. This practice was common because the soil of the hills lost its fertility after a few seasons as the rains would wash away the top layer.

By twentieth century this territorial fluidity had begun to undergo a change. The policies of the British Empire led to the production and rearrangement of spaces to the extent that the modern understanding of territory as a political entity had taken centre-stage in the North-East's alignment with India. Tribal groups who had hitherto avoided the mechanisms of a nation state began to demand a stake in the sentiments of nationalism that shadowed the withdrawal of the British governance from the area at the time of Independence. As a result, the concept of "ethno-nationalism" emerged to define the movements of secession that rose in various parts of North-East India. Under ethno-nationalism, several tribal groups rejected the idea of belonging to India as members of its imagined community. Instead, they asserted themselves to be racially, historically, and culturally different from the rest of India and demanded a severance from the Indian nation state that they saw as an alien entity. The

secession movements also proved that the Indian nation had failed in integrating the people at its peripheries. It could not elicit patriotism and loyalty for the newly independent country. The tribal groups felt that aligning with India would be a continuation of its colonization under the British, only this time the masters would be different.

The understanding of territory in North-East, therefore, underwent massive changes in a short span of time. At first the region was understood to be a forested tract of land inhabited by many tribes. Within a few decades, it came to be included into the idea of Indian nationhood. In between the two phases, the region experienced becoming a conglomeration of Christian fields. As such, territory became a major contributor to the area's engagement with modernity. In other words, the duality of politics and religion, where both the colonial state and the missionary enterprise supplied policies and politics to the area, shaped the emergence of territory. This is not to say that tribal groups were not territorial before the arrival of missionaries and bureaucrats. They were deeply possessive of their lands and forests and fought many wars to protect their dominance over these spaces. However, the native understanding of territoriality was more fluid than that espoused by European nations who had fixed boundaries. Many studies have been undertaken to connect the emergence of territory with the coming of the colonial state. The establishment of British posts in the North-East, the annexation of Nagaland and Manipur, and the introduction of the Inner Line Permit in 1873 bear testament to the way colonial policies controlled the geography. However, the historical role played by the pastorate in bringing notions of territoriality is less explored. Therefore, in addition to the political developments that shaped territoriality of North-East in nineteenth century, this chapter shall argue that the missionary enterprise had a strong influence in the formation of territory by supplying many places with modern concepts of land possession and land control. In the process, this chapter shall engage with select texts that bear witness to the transition. These texts written by missionary men and women deal with the geography of the valleys and

hills and present the confluence of colonialism, religion, and race into the making of these places.

The study of territoriality relies on three memoirs as primary sources. The memoirs are *Korno Siga: The Mountain Chief* (1889) by Mrs. Anna Kay Smith who published the book under the pseudonym of Mrs. Mildred Marston, *Sowing Seed in Assam* (1925) by Ella Marie Holmes, and *In Villages and Tea Gardens* (1945) by O.L Swanson. These books were all concerned with the geographical mode and wrote of the ‘field’ of missionary labors. Some of the chapter titles of the *Sowing Seed in Assam* show how the geographic mode dominates the memoir: “Assam-The Wettest Land on Earth,” “Some Letters from the Field,” “Wayside Ministries” and “Christmas on a Mission Station.” Writing the introduction to the narrative, Helen Barret Montgomery, pays tribute to Holmes’ evocation of the sense faculties of sight and sound, which are most closely tied to the geography of the place: “There is an unusual quality that runs through Miss Holmes’ narrative. She makes you see things and hear things, almost as if you were on the ground, and her reactions are not ordinary ones.” In *Villages and Tea Gardens*, the title of the memoir itself bears geographical markers. The writer inhabits and prepares the field, and the memoir evokes the ways in which he performs this task. The story of inhabitation and preparation also surfaces in *Korno Siga*. Full chapters are devoted to describe “Our Mountain Home”. The geographical marker “mountain” also attaches itself to the central native character “Korno Siga” whose story of evolution towards Christianity is a thematic feature the narrative sets out to tell along with that of its author.

5.1 A brief theory of territory

The nineteenth century was marked by a rise in state-making enterprises in many parts of the world. One of its primary requirements was a boundary to seal its powers of influence. In *The Birth of Territory*, an extensive study of how territory became central to modern states,

Stuart Elden writes that territory became an “extension” of state power under which the population could be managed.¹¹¹ There was a pressing requirement to identify, map, and seal the boundaries of its jurisdiction that it could call its state territory. Elden argues that territoriality or the fencing of land was “foundation of civil society...that is, society with some form of structure and power relations. Civil society was, effectively, a society with some form of government, some form of state” (1). This means territory as a political term can only be operational through the involvement of different stakeholders. One person/authority has to claim the right over the area and others are required to validate the claimant. The fencing of land marked the understanding of the space therein as something that can be divided and owned, thereby introducing the concept of property and justice. The marking of land and thus the beginning of civil society became the precursor of sovereignty in modern times when nation-states began to define their boundaries to govern their people without interference from other nations.

According to Elden, in order to understand territory, it is important to study it in relation to two components—land and terrain—that creates and sustains it. First, territory consists of land or property that exists in the form of commodity. It can be bought, sold or exchanged as “a finite resource that is distributed, allocated, and owned—a political economic question” (9). Any territory would require the presence of land and its other modules such as water, green cover and natural resources around which it can exert its political power and implement its economic policies. Terrain, on the other hand, indicates the “strategy” through which the land is claimed and controlled by the sovereign/state. It is “a relation of power, with a heritage in geology and the military” (9). In a separate essay on the concept of “terrain”, Elden defines it as more than just the physical properties of land such as valleys and hills, dry and tropical, or plateau and marshy, but as part of a political theory “which takes into account legal questions,

¹¹¹ Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory*, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

alongside economic, strategic, technical and scientific ones”.¹¹² The terrain decides the policies dictating the territory and its safety. According to Elden, terrain incorporates the measures of security that Foucault extols in his work. He writes:

“Territory is political and geographical certainly, but these are bundled together with economic, strategic, legal and technical notions. The complicated and nuanced understanding of the legal, and its attendant techniques of rules and regulations; and more obvious technical techniques such as planning, surveying, mapping, engineering, logistics, operations, regulating and so on, are one of the reasons why I suggested we could think of territory as a political technology, or a bundle of political technologies. Technologies embrace not just the technical, but a wider framework of activities, legal regimes, practices and so on.”¹¹³

To summarize, Stuart Elden, makes three important arguments in his works. Firstly, the English word “territory” is a complicated term where it has signified different things at different times. While a sovereign needs a jurisdiction, it wasn’t always a marked territory. In the Greek time, the “polis” did not signify a specific place, the Roman “empire” did not have known boundaries and the historically broad Middle Ages did not culminate in rigidly bounded nations. Secondly, the concept of politics within a “territory” emerged sometime in the eighteenth century. The need to map, highlight, demarcate spaces for jurisdiction became important with the emergence of modern nations. It is here that the biopolitics of geography emerged in retaining and creating a nation as we understand it today. Third, Elden identifies land as a political-economic concept. He suggests that “the importance of property in land is clear from as far back as there is recorded human history.... as a distinctive mode of

¹¹² Stuart Elden, “Legal Terrain: The Political Materiality of Territory”, *London Review of International Law Annual Lecture at SOAS University of London*, 23 February 2017.

¹¹³ Ibid.

social/spatial organization, one that is historically and geographically limited and dependent, rather than a biological drive or social need” (10, *The Birth of Territory*). Thus, modern territory is understood through key terminologies of the mechanisms of governmentality such as “calculation” and “statistics.”

As we can gather from the above, spatial organization carries with it the implications of power play in its conception and management. Michel Foucault, alongside his powerful analysis of population, directs our attention to the discourse of territory. He writes that throughout history, the idea of territory evolved in close connection with the discourse of power. In plain terms, the notion of territory, at any given time and place, is bound together with the kind of power that operates in the society. Firstly, territory began as a feudal discursive concept; it was closely connected with a society that operated according to customary laws, under the rule of a sovereign. The sovereign ruler could change the boundaries of the territory depending on his power and capability. He could either conquer more territory or focus on protecting the territory already under him. The territory was therefore fluid under this system. Modern state making began from the sixteenth century onwards when the focus began to shift towards territorial sovereignty and the consolidation of a population. Foucault writes:

“Since the sixteenth century, a new political form of power has been continuously developing. This new political structure, as everyone knows, is the state....state’s power is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power...this is due to the fact that the modern Western state has integrated into a new political shape an old power technique that originated in Christian institutions. We call this power technique ‘pastoral power.’” (332).¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, James D. Faubion et. al, *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Vol. 3*, The New Press, 2001.

The formation of the church was based on the principal that its flock or members must be governed in such a way that they attain spiritual salvation. The church minister, in the metaphor of the shepherd, explored the minds and lifestyle of its people to facilitate guidelines to govern its every aspect. From sixteenth century onwards, pastoral power “spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution” and reshaped itself under secular sovereign governance (333). For Foucault, territory is one aspect of this power. In his study of Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Foucault argues that the “governance” of people required two conditions—“the territory and the other, its inhabitants” (134).¹¹⁵ In other words, sovereignty required a territorial jurisdiction so it can identify its inhabitants or flock based on these physical boundaries. Foucault writes “In this sense, we can say that the territory is the fundamental element both in Machiavellian principality and in juridical sovereignty as defined by philosophers or legal theorists,” (134). According to him, however, the primary focus of modern governance in seventeenth to twentieth century has been population. He asserts that modern political structure as a state of government is “no longer essentially defined by its territoriality, by the surface occupied, but by a mass; the mass of the population, with its volume, its density, and for sure, its territory over which it is extended, but which is, in a way, only one of its components” (110).

Foucault’s statements about the importance of territory or the lack of it courted some controversy as it seemed to dim the importance of territory in modern governance. Stuart Elden, however, points out that the techniques of governance as listed out by Foucault, in fact, make territory more important than the writer may have made it appear. First, discipline and security while focusing on the population do so within the ambit of territory. In rustling up statistics such as mortality rates, birth rates, health, marriages, schools and crime rates, the state chooses

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population: Lectures at College de France 1977-78*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

its demography based on the limits of its boundaries. Second, the technologies of security are implemented with equal fervor on space through its “mapping, ordering, measuring, and demarcation”.¹¹⁶ Elden writes, “Territory is a political technology: it comprises techniques for measuring land and techniques for controlling terrain. Foucault’s analysis of the politics of calculation is, therefore, crucial, but not as something which only manifests itself in population, but, rather, in territory too” (14). In other words, modern state formations are testaments to the way the concept of territory has emerged as an administrative state with clearly defined boundaries guarded by regulations and disciplines. All the modern nations conformed to this treatment of territory, though there may be disputes over ownership of some parts with other nations. It is, however, safe to say that modern states have clear outlined boundaries within which it exercises its governance or as Foucault puts it, “sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory” (25, *Security, Territory, Population*). The technologies that are implemented on the population are also targeted at the sustenance and protection of territory. Elden writes in “How Should We Do the History of Territory” that territory is governed through four registers “economic, strategic, legal and technical. Any study of modern territory requires an engagement with its various parameters through which territory gets validation. But before one analyses these conditions of modern territory, one also needs to look at the way the concept of territory emerged in different ways in Europe and Asia. Whereas in Europe, the transformation began in the eighteenth century, in India and its frontier region of North-East, the experiences were vastly different as we shall see in the next segment.

5.2 No man’s land

Whereas the analysis of territory by Elden and Foucault focused on the European evolution of the concept and practice, North-East India’s engagement with the subject adds

¹¹⁶ Stuart Elden, “How Should We do the History of Territory?” *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1:1, pages 5-20, 2013.

another dimension to its overall understanding. This is primarily because unlike Europe where a feudal system of governance was practiced for much of its modern history, in many parts of North-East India, people opted to stay out of the state's reach. In his analysis of these populations, James Scott claims in *The Art of Not Being Governed* that the populations living in the hills of South East Asia, including North-East India, had existed without a nation state for two thousand years by formulating a lifestyle and society that dismissed any requirement for such projects.¹¹⁷ Scott argues that by making agriculture a nomadic activity where tribal groups kept shifting their residence every few years, they managed to do away with the need to be “settled” in a state and owe allegiance to a monarch for protection. Calling these geographical units “zomia” Scott articulates that it was a conscious decision to keep away from state machineries as the zomians chose to live in the peripheries where the geographical isolation dissuaded the neighbouring feudal set-up to creep into the hills.

The zomians resisted the first step of the emergence of the nation state—permanent residence subsisted by sedentary agricultural practices. Instead, the zomians kept moving from one place to another in the same elevation and continued to practice forms of economy that did not require having a “state”. According to Scott, in opposition to the economic cycle of the zomians, namely “foraging, hunting, shifting cultivation, fishing, and pastoralism” (6) nation states required its residents to acquire a permanent place of residence so it can oversee the social contracts of the population. He writes, “State rulers find it well-nigh impossible to install an effective sovereignty over people who are constantly in motion, who have no permanent pattern of organization, no permanent address, whose leadership is ephemeral, whose subsistence patterns are pliable and fugitive, who have few permanent allegiances, and who are liable, over time, to shift their linguistic practices and their ethnic identity” (38). Scott attacked the belief that the stateless societies of the peripheries were somehow “backward, naïve, and

¹¹⁷ James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Yale University Press, 2009.

perhaps barbaric people (who) are gradually incorporated into an advanced, superior, and more prosperous society and culture” (8). According to him, the inhabitants of the hilly areas, denounced statehood and chose self-governance over any other forms as a well-thought out strategy to keep the state at arm’s length.

These hilly establishments thrived alongside feudal kingdoms such as Assam, Manipur, and Tripura, where centuries old tradition of monarchy was prevalent at the time of their annexation by the British. The Tripura royal family’s history of kingship over the place are recorded in *Rajmala* commissioned and written in the fifteenth century. The *Imperial Gazetteer of India* notes that *Rajmala* chronicled the emergence of the Manikya dynasty of Tripura and how the state was at constant feud with tribes living in its boundaries. In addition, the king held a “large landed property called Chakla Roshnabad situated in the plains of the Districts of Tippera, Noakhali, and Sylhet” (118-119).¹¹⁸ The villagers and the jhum cultivators were required to pay taxes and provide men for the army. This kingdom thrived alongside the hills of North-East which did not have an equivalent structure. Till much of nineteenth century, territory stayed fluid in South Asia with kingdoms limited to a few areas. The borders were flexible and dependent on the geographical conditions and might of the king. The plains with its easier access to movements saw the establishment of kingdoms whereas the hills with its difficult terrain saw people rejecting the idea of one.

It was only the arrival of the colonizers and their zealous road-making that created conditions for turning the hills into zones of modern governance propelled by new capitalist economy. In the context of North India, Christopher Bayly writes that the coming of the British transformed agrarian places into zones of trading. Terming it “indigenous capitalism”, Bayly argues that since the East India Company was primarily interested in commodity trade, it

¹¹⁸ *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Volume 13, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

promoted the development of markets for local produce.¹¹⁹ In North-East India, the emergence of tea plantations in Assam is an example of one such endeavor through which the Company wanted to increase its economic profitability. However, the enterprise followed a mix of policies where hills stayed mostly untouched. The rest of the economy was a mixture of promotion of cash crops as well as preservation of traditional mode of agriculture in the form of *jhum* cultivation. Till 1990s, nearly 4 lakh families were still sustaining themselves through *jhum*.¹²⁰ According to Sajal Nag, the making of North-Eastern states did not follow a capitalist progression but instead the middle class emerged through missionary intervention. Giving the example of “overwhelmingly tribal” Naga Hills, Nag argues that it was a space where neither kingship nor capitalism took roots.¹²¹ He writes, “The middle class that emerged in the Naga Hills, had its roots neither in the landed aristocracy nor did it evolve through commercial development” (60). This is an interesting addition to Christopher Bayly’s study of Indian economy during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Whereas Bayly argues that colonization of Northern India was successful due to trade, Nag suggests that in the North-East it was missionary activities that drove the change. In this regard, the study of missionary role becomes even more important as their policies led to a job-based economy where newly educated youth turned to small entrepreneurship, salaried bureaucracy, and jobs such as teaching, medicine, law etc. Aside from the donations from abroad, the evangelical mission could only rely on contributions by the native Christians to sustain its economy.

¹¹⁹ Christopher A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1988.

¹²⁰ K. R. Dikshit, Jutta K. Dikshit, *North-East India: Land, People, and Economy*, Springer, 1993 (p:587).

¹²¹ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-east India*, Manohar and Distributors, 2002.

5.3 The Kingdom of God: Fashioning a modern field

Two kinds of power simultaneously created a territory for North-East India. On one hand while the official colonial enterprise determined its jurisdiction by drawing lines on its frontier through brute force, the missionary enterprise while being respectful of these boundaries, also looked beyond it to make the North-East India a part of the Kingdom of God that transcended the bureaucratic understanding.

In American Baptist literature, the idea of a territory is often marked with the word “field” –an area with an imagined border within which the missionary or the shepherds manage and maintain their stock as part of the larger Kingdom of God. This formulation of kingdom is itself seen as the penultimate purpose of the Christian Pastorate that must seize history in its hands and mould a Christian empire. From 1836 onwards, the missionaries began to earmark human settlements and the land surrounding it into “fields” or mission “stations” with the sanction of the bureaucratic government and the American Baptist Association of America. Essentially these “fields” and “stations” filled in the gap between statelessness and the consolidation of a colonial state that began with the advent of the British. As the names suggest, fields and stations were spatial markers of ushering in the territory of the kingdom of God that could exist alongside the colonial territory.

Geographical location and mapping was of prime importance in the quest of God’s kingdom on earth. Giorgio Agamben in *The Kingdom and the Glory* explains the existence and proliferation of churches in the world by linking it with the way Christianity understands the concept of time.¹²² Agamben writes that Christian theology believes that there will be a Second Coming of Christ once the word of God has reached every corner of the world. He writes that the entirety of the world is “Catechontic....there is something that defers and holds back the

¹²² Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2011

eschaton, that is, the advent of the Kingdom and the end of the world....the present history of humanity is therefore an interim founded on the delay of the Kingdom” (7). In other words, the Christian pastorate exists only as long as this kingdom is deferred as its purpose will cease as soon as it is achieved. The pastorate in the colony thus prepares for a kingdom of the God, which is ironically deferred to the future.

The preparation for the second coming required a temporal organization of space. It is this process of preparation which is articulated through the metaphor of ‘field’ and ‘station’. These are spaces under God’s jurisdiction in which the designated workers implement pastoral power to manage the population in the His name. Agamben writes that while Foucault draws his arguments from sixteenth century works, this management of population goes farther back to the middle ages where the system of governance was identified by the term *oikonomia*. The term at different points in history signified the “government of men” or the “administration of the house” in which the management of the world is split among the Holy Trinity. Essentially, the term signals the doctrine that God does not do all the work by himself but appoints helpers who would do the governance in his name creating a dichotomy of the Kingdom and the government. The Kingdom, representing God, does not directly involve with the mechanisms of everyday upkeep of the world. *Oikonomia* could therefore be seen as a “divine plan of salvation” (20) before the eschaton. Initially, the second coming depended on the “survival or the disappearance of the Jews” (16) but from the eighteenth century onwards, the missionary enterprises broadened the scope by including the conversion of “heathens” of the colonized world. Ultimately, the “Kingdom of God” in nineteenth and twentieth century signalled the progress made by missionaries around the world in their successes at building churches in foreign lands. According to Agamben, *oikonomia* established the platform for territorialisation by marking a jurisdiction on earth. Agamben, much like Foucault, argues that the modern state government is a derivative or the “signature” of the divine *oikonomia* and requires a

temporality to put the concept to practice. He quotes nineteenth century writer Stefan Von Doornick in asserting: “If the emperor grants somebody the jurisdiction and the power to judge [potestas iudicandz], but does not allot him a province or a people to be judged, he will then have the title, that is the name, but not the practice” (99) .

Whereas “Kingdom of God” is a concept that was derived from medieval times, the notion was modernized in the eighteenth century into “fields” and “stations” that served as the jurisdiction for *oikonomia* to be practiced. Thus, during the transition from statelessness to modern sovereignty many parts of the colonized regions became the grounds on which the missionaries attempted to build the Kingdom of God by earmarking a territory. Building churches in these places solidified the jurisdiction of the missions by making settlements permanent for the hitherto stateless tribes. There was now a solid marker—the church—around which residences could be built and populations could emerge. The “fields” and “missions” were microcosm of the larger British territory in which rules and regulations were in keeping with colonial necessities of making the people docile, as argued in the second chapter. Whereas the colonial state looked at profitability of territory in the economic sense, Christian missionaries were focussed on the people themselves. What we are looking at here, therefore, are two ways in which territory came to existence. One is by the forceful annexation of land by the British, and the other is by way of missionaries who focussed on the population.

Between 1836 and 1886, the Baptist mission had seven functional stations with 1775 church members.¹²³ This number saw a huge growth in the coming years and by 1935, when the Baptist Missionaries began preparations for its centenary, there were 12 major stations and 54154 members.¹²⁴ These fields that started with small numbers and a few homes spread outwards and enveloped entire hamlets, villages, towns and cities that had grown alongside the

¹²³ *Assam Mission*, statistics, American Baptist Mission, 1886.

¹²⁴ Victor Hugo Sword, *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service*, first published in USA by Conference Press, 1935, Pages 141-142

progress of Christianity. A total of 907 temporary and permanent churches operated in the pre-independence Assam Province before it was divided into individual states. Territory, whether colonial or pastoral, was a diverse experience because of the sheer heterogeneity of the existing state formations in the nineteenth century. Some areas like the princely state of Tripura had feudal kings who were later forced into submitting to the British rule but at the same time they retained the right to deny entry to missionaries. In both such spaces, those that allowed missionaries and those that didn't, the concept of territory led to the emergence of modern states. In places where missionaries managed to establish their dominance, the "fields" became a source of damage control in which sovereignty became more and more desirable for the residents.

5.4 Geographical imaginations

The geographical appropriation of North-East bears the question: if all fields are conceptualised in the service of God, how does one distinguish one from the other? How is Guwahati field different from the Naga field or the Garo field, or are they all same? Answering these questions require understanding, in greater detail, the act of "difference" through which a place or a "field" is given its character. Here, Penny Fielding's *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830* helps in exploring a possible analogy between Scotland in the late eighteenth-century and the North-East region in the late nineteenth-century.¹²⁵ Both regions experienced the intervention of the British territorial state in their transition to modernity. In her work, Penny Fielding argues that literary engagement with a place's geography contributes significantly to determining and constructing its character. Fielding demonstrates her stance by tracing the literary construction of Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily during the Romantic period, in which many writers built a

¹²⁵ Penny Fielding, *Scotland and the Fictions of Geography: North Britain, 1760-1830*, Cambridge, 2008.

discourse surrounding the place on the basis of its geography. Fielding draws attention to how seemingly innocent terminologies, such as signifying Scotland as the North of Britain, dictated its identity based “entirely by its structural position” (16). According to her, once Scotland was established and identified as Northern Britain, the term created homogenizing as well as dividing tendencies. It aligned Scotland to Britain but also marked it as “secondary” since it was dependent on the latter for its recognition. Furthermore, as Scotland began to appear in more and more literary works, it began to be endowed with certain singular characteristics that contributed towards creating its national identity by setting it apart from its neighbours.

Essentially, therefore, Fielding makes three notable points. First, that a place comes to existence in our consciousness by way of the stories narrated about it. The geographical representation bestows a place with certain characteristics that create and sustain it. In a sense, therefore, narratives of geography are “staged and inscribed” through its depiction in literary discourses (14). Stories on Scotland created it as a place that can be divided into categories of mountainous Highlands, fertile Lowlands, and modern cities, traits that mark it as a distinct entity. Fielding claims that constructions of geography tend to sculpt a place into a particular structure by overlooking its “complex spatial and temporal relations of Scottish localities” (2). In other words, geographical mode of narration simplifies the complexity of a place in order to turn it into a “type”.

Second, the fictions of geography contribute towards giving a place its character by tracing its history. In this scheme of things, Scotland is constructed to be a place that is undergoing multiple level of progress that is imprinted on its very geography. If the historical progression of mankind can be graded from barbarism to civility, the landscape of Scotland was a living example. The Highlands with its “bleak landscape” (3) are areas that are cut off from the metropolis and hence it is characterized as “fiery and ferocious” (54) and barbaric, whereas the lowlands with its commercial towns such as Edinburgh and Glasgow are deemed

“cool and circumspect” (54) and therefore modern. Not only does Scotland become a “living museum” (3) of natural history but it has the effect of connecting geography, history and social discourses where the inhabitants of these places are deemed civilized or uncivilized based on their area of residence. Fielding points out that in the works of Baillie Nicol Jarvie, Glasgow merchant and magistrate, the rude geography of the Highlands are inhabited by a “lazy” population as opposed to the “commercial, profitable” population of the Lowland (98).

Third, when a place becomes more and more distinct through its geography, it lays the ground for its making as a nation. According to Fielding, engagements with geography makes a place “visible to the economic, scientific and historical eye” (2). The eighteenth and nineteenth century preoccupation with cartography was an attempt to make Scotland “legible” to the world. Notably, the making of a place into a nation involves accommodating the uneven development of its localities. So, even though the Highlands are “barbaric”, and the Lowlands are “civilized,” both local experiences are assimilated into the national geography. Fielding asserts that this co-existence is a modern trait where it “produces the position that allows us to see how different times exist in different spaces, by virtue of its own claim to be itself all one space and time” (73). Certain symbols that connect the two phases of development reinforce the “social geometries” of the nation. In the context of Scotland, the two symbols that Fielding focusses on are road-making and the England-Scotland border; both contribute towards providing a “visible shape to the nation” (81). Fielding contends that the authorities in eighteenth and nineteenth century were obsessed with road-building as a means to smoothen the divide between Highlands and Lowlands. With the frantic construction of roads, the land was transformed into transportation routes thereby changing its nature of existence. Fielding writes, “Roads unite the nation, on a blueprint drawn by Adam Smith, giving it a centralized market and a commodity economy that move it from barbarism to capitalism at a stroke” (78). A tweak in the geography, where land loses its ancient function and becomes a delivery route,

reduces the distance between the centre and the periphery, having a direct impact on the social fabric of the society by uniting the two sides. On the other hand, boundaries drawn around a nation seals it as a separate entity from its neighbours. Creation of a territory, therefore, cannot be separated from its geographical imaginations. In other words, a geographical space is bestowed with features and traits that give it an identity through which it can be separated from its neighbours as happened with the “fields” of North-East.

5.5 Gendered Spaces within North-East India

One of the fundamental ways in which post-colonial scholarship has contributed to the understanding of colonial modernity is to view the undertaking through the prism of gender construction. The missionary pastorate formulated its policies, built its architecture and promoted its cultural imbrication through a sustained gendering of its subjects that redefined what it meant to be a Christian man and a Christian woman. An enquiry into the gender question in the North East must begin with taking cognizance of the fact that colonisation requires what Catherine Hall calls, “mutual constitution: making self, making others” (50).¹²⁶ When the missionaries arrived in the North-East, they had to construct the colonial-evangelical difference between themselves and the natives. Their argument often began to centre on “gender” and they sought to describe how the distinctions of masculinity and femininity figured in the colonizer-colonized relationship. The missionaries discovered that womanhood meant different things in different parts of the lands. While in the ‘Aryanised’ parts of Assam, Hindu women were curtailed in the *zenana*, in the Garo Hills, tribal women “seemed to enjoy perfect freedom.”¹²⁷ In the absence of the evils of traditional Hindu civic society in the hills, the missionary narrative began to focus on the difference of household management between

¹²⁶ Catherine Hall, “Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century.” *Gender and Empire*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2004, 46-76

¹²⁷ Miriam R. Burdette, “Work for Garo Women.” *Assam Mission*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission, 1887

Christians and the heathen women. They found that women in the hills wore fewer pieces of clothing, were illiterate, followed pagan religions and were mired in their blind superstitions and rituals.

Missionary writers wrote that they were deeply concerned with the status of women in colonized societies and attempted to justify their presence in the colony as a natural necessity for the upliftment of the native women. In the process, the missionary wives and daughters discovered a ‘public role’ for themselves in the colony that was perhaps not so readily available to them in the metropolis. Catherine Hall highlights that while colonization took control of native political spaces, an intense conflict was fought in the domain of private homes over the rights of women to education, independence and most importantly, to the right to live after the death of the husband. Citing the example of *sati* tradition and the way the British used the “figure of the abject Hindu woman” to legitimize its rule in India, Hall claims the stereotypes of native societies “travelled across the Empire” (58).¹²⁸ The Hindu widow began to be seen as a symbol of everything wrong with the Indian society and “must be saved by the civilizing mission” (54). Her destitution necessitated intervention from the mission.

Indian men and women both began to be sorted into stereotypes that were not always rigid but underwent variations depending on the strata, caste and religion. If women were portrayed as destitute in the narratives surrounding *sati*, they were equally prone to be portrayed as over-sexualized as a justification of why they needed to join the husband’s funeral pyre. Hindu men, on the other hand, were represented as “passive, indolent and effeminate, easily conquered whether by Mughal Emperors or the British,” while Muslims were seen as “violent, despotic and masculine” (55). According to Hall, these representations reinforced the

¹²⁸ Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2004.

“masculinity” of the British enterprise and provided the English way of life as the desirable form of civil society which native societies must adhere to.

The missionaries wasted no time in inculcating this particular belief in their missions and actively promoted the “desire to turn sinners into new Christian subjects, living industrious, domesticated, and familial lives” (59). The missionary men, however, could not do so unless they set an example first. Thus, most missionary societies preferred to send married couples to the “field” where the men would successfully resist seduction by native women. This led to the reinforcement of the discourse of domestic conjugality that saw man and wife as companions and helpmates in a foreign land where they worked hand in hand to establish a civilization.

This civilizing mission had to undergo a few crucial changes in the hills of North-East where the American missionaries found a society stripped of what they felt was wrong with mainland Hindu and Muslim societies. Though patriarchy was ingrained in the fabric, women enjoyed more rights and freedom among these communities. With no narrative of the destitute Hindu woman to champion, or effeminate men to strengthen, missionaries began to focus more on the creation of a specific discourse of ideal domesticity where the woman embraced the dual role of an able manager of the home as well as of a helpmate in the world outside. Though Hall writes that the “family” became a cornerstone of the new civilization “with its manly, independent male heads of households operating in the world of work and politics,” and “its feminine, dependent, wives and mothers, confined to the sphere of home,” (51) in colonial North-East, the American missionary woman served as the ideal homemaker within her domestic world as well as a helpmate outside of the confines. Hence, within the geography of North-East India, spaces occupied by missionaries began to witness a loosening of some of the rigidity witnessed back in America. These changes come to fore when reading women’s narratives “against the grain”. Women missionaries were exalted for their role as wives and mothers but they could rarely enjoy the joys of motherhood as they had to send their children

away at a young age to protect them from the weather and disease of North-East India. The absence of children gave women the scope to actively engage in schoolwork, translation, door-to-door preaching, and leading the prayer meetings. The Browns who were one of the pioneering missionary couples write that they had to send their two children away to ensure their health and development. The Browns had lost their two children, Sophia and William to sudden illnesses, that caused them intense pain and suffering. They wanted the safety of their remaining two children (272).¹²⁹ Similarly Mrs. Anna Kay Scott in *Korno Siga* had to send away her children “from a climate where they no longer could thrive, and place them where they could have the bracing air of a temperate zone, and the educational advantages of a civilized and Christian country” (177). The ideal American domestic dream was not practical in the colonies, yet, the mission enterprise thrived on the notion of family.

In addition, whereas women were expected to be ideal home makers through their strong supervision of the household, they also employed full-time nannies and cooks to travel with them. Just like a male missionary performed his duties with the aid of the natives, the missionary woman, too, necessitated the same women who she chastised, to run her household. This contradiction comes to fore in extracts where they describe the women of North-East. Mrs Brown in *Whole World Kin* witnessed two women fighting in a village and writes that there was a lot of “discord and rage” in the village and there was “not a single countenance beaming with love and benevolence” (249). Within the geography of North-East, the spaces were deemed to replicate the chaos within. It effected the way the missionaries represented themselves as well as the people.

¹²⁹ Nathan Brown, *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and Other Labors of Nathan Brown*, Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers Publishers. 1890

5.6 Colonial Geography and its implications on the missionary enterprise

Keeping in mind the creation of a place through the combination of politics, geographical imaginations and techniques of security (road making, border demarcation, division of land-use etc), a similar preoccupation can be witnessed in the way North-East was produced in the nineteenth century. The British administration early on observed that the geography of the North-East could be broadly broken down into the plains of Brahmaputra valley and the hills that ascended around it. Their gazettes and books strengthened the creation of binaries based on the geographical markers of the plains, with its rivers and temples, and the hills with its forest dwellers and diseases. When the missionaries arrived, they too, adopted the geographical binaries of the British bureaucracy and chose to continue visualizing the North-East as two entities based on the altitude. Other factors such as the cultural and linguistic differences of the tribes helped break down the area into smaller units. The missionaries also figured that the plains people had converted to Hinduism whereas the hill people had stayed oblivious to any organized religion making it pertinent to have two separate policies of preaching in the plains and the hills.

Politically, British recognized the valley population and the hill population as having two distinct relationships with state power. The valleys of present day Assam, Manipur and Tripura had been tamed through the feudal systems that had existed there for hundreds of years. These places were headed by a series of kings to whom the population paid taxes and allegiance, and to whom they supplied men for an army. These areas also had a more settled population who practiced stable agriculture. The rest of the area comprising of hills had existed without a unifying authority and was devoid of the structures of feudalism. Missionary writings used much of the geographical factors to demarcate their fields of supervision having very early realized that it was easier to penetrate the hills where feudal hierarchy didn't exist. Whereas in the hills the missionaries only required the permission of the British administration to operate,

it required further permissions from the feudal courts to enter Tripura and Manipur. As such, they were denied this request in Tripura whereas they received permission to work in Manipur under the strict clause that they will limit their activities to imparting “secular education” among the tribal communities. William Pettigrew who established a Baptist mission in Manipur wrote about his struggles in *Forty Years in Manipur* in treading the line between purely academic work and evangelism¹³⁰.

5.6.1 The inner line permit

For the first few decades of its annexation, the colonial government primarily viewed the hill tribes as pesky inconveniences. British civil servant Sir Alexander Mackenzie, who later became the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1895, wrote a book in 1884 called *The North-East Frontier of India* to take stock of the British relations with the North-East. He writes that in 1872-73, the colonial government ascribed the “inner line” to bring under “more stringent control the commercial relations of our own subjects with the frontier tribes living on the borders of our jurisdiction” (55). The inner line drew a boundary between the plains and the hills and mandated that “outsiders” could only enter the hills with an official permit from the British government. This ensured that the British had full control on the commercial possibilities of the resource-rich forests in the highlands. This particular policy had an enormous repercussion on the relation between the hills and the rest of the nation wherein the British deepened the divide between plains people and hill people and used geography to draw the territory of the two set of populations. Whereas the hill population could visit or relocate to the plains the same choice was not made available to the rest. The policy, which stands till today, has shaped the politics, land conflicts, and the identity of the people of Assam and the neighbouring hills.

¹³⁰ *Forty years in Manipur, Assam: An account of the work of Rev. & Mrs. William Pettigrew, collected and printed in 1986*

Along with the inner line permit (ILP) came the ethnographic differentiation of the hills and valleys. The population began to be divided into the binaries of civilized-uncivilized, tamed-untamed, lazy-active, and safe-dangerous. In many missionary works, the plains were geographically portrayed as more civilized due to the presence of roads, tea-gardens, and literature, but ethnographically, the people themselves were considered to be lazy, dishonest, and stubborn. Compared to that, the hill population, though lacking in markers of ‘development’ were considered more hard-working and honest that made them suitable to become ideal Christians.

The early missionaries came prepared to study North-East as a geographical entity. In his paper “General View of Assam,” Rev P. H. Moore lists out the position of Assam on the global map by recognising its importance in the context of consolidating its hold on other territories.¹³¹ He writes that Assam’s location at the very north-east corner of the Indian Empire, bringing it into relation with border tribes, and also promising a way into Tibet and Western China “lends it a degree of importance than commensurate with its relative size” (1). It is a complicated situation because while Assam as a territory had been seized by British, the population was way diverse than the bureaucrats and the missionaries had experienced in their own native places. They found that the people in the plains and the natives of the hills had different cultures, languages, and identity. While the plains people could be divided into Hindus and Muslims with varying differences, the “sturdy limbs” of the hill people combined with “prominent cheek-bones and slightly Mongolian case of features mark him as different from the Assamese” (16). According to the missionary, it’s the “sturdy legs” that identify the population of the hills as it is “proof of mountain climbing” (16). There is a clear divide based on climatic conditions that is described in the following passage:

¹³¹ P. H. Moore, “General View of Assam,” *Assam Mission*, 1886.

“We have already noted that more than forty languages and dialects are spoken in Assam. Half of these are languages of the hill tribe people. All these hill people are demon-worshippers, but each tribe has its own demons, and its own ceremonies, preserved in pristine purity, or largely modified by their environment.” (16)

The missionary archives point at two contributing factors of geography in determining the character of the place—first, the topography separated the hill and plains on the basis of elevation, and second, it tried to explain the manifestations of the locale on to the nature of the people themselves. The reason why hill people were deemed innocent and childlike was because the harsh terrain made it terribly inconvenient for the religion and ‘cunningness’ of the plains to reach the upper altitude and corrupt them. There were no roads leading from the plains of Assam to the interior hills. One had to trek through dense forest and climb steep slopes to reach the villages thereby keeping the hilly tribes in their ‘innocent’ stage.

5.6.2. Framing stereotypes

The chronology of missionary works provide a glimpse of the way the North-East evolved in the literary field. The earliest writings were predominantly concerned with narrating the potential of Assam as the gateway to the rest of the area. The Baptist missionaries wrote histories of people and places located in the valley of Assam and assimilated the hill tribes in the narrative without making them the principal subjects of investigation. The mission itself was named the “Assam Mission” as the hills were officially seen as an extension of the province for the convenience of administration. The annual reports of this mission were the first missionary writings on the area. But, within this unifying province, the Christian fields were classified on the basis of place and ethnicity. The plains of Assam had fields such as Sibsagar, Guwahati, and Nowgong where the population was more or less Hindu Aryans. The hilly fields were called Naga Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and further subdivided into communities that

inhabited those hills. Over the years as the mission and the Empire started making inroads into the highlands, the tribals began to receive separate attention and books such as *The Lushai Hills* (1907), *The Garo Jungle Book* (1919), and *The Star of Naga Hills* (1927) were published. These books narrated the lived experiences of missionaries who engaged with these places and established a Baptist church among the respective communities.

The written works on the North-East were predominantly involved in creating a place that would cater to the imaginations of its reading public back home and justify its annexation at the hands of the British. This meant that the North-East be portrayed as the polar opposite of England and America in terms of its social and spatial structure. The notion itself rested on the ambivalence that whereas the European sovereignty was to be respected, Asian spaces, even where kingship existed, lacked the cohesion of a state and therefore mandated outside interference. Missionary narratives presented a place defined by its destitution and distance from any sovereign civilization. Assam had lost its kingly figure and the hills had no central authority. Even places with a feudal set up such as the princely states of Manipur and Tripura were uncivilized, remote, and uncouth. This meant that the North-East lacked a civil society that could be entrusted with sovereignty and the responsibility of fashioning its territory. Garry Kearns in his essay “The Territory of Colonialism” argues that the difference between territorial formations in the West versus the colonized world is that the former was preceded by the creation of a civil society¹³². Meanwhile, colonialism is channelled by “revenue extraction” and therefore the enterprise always made claims on the territory as the precursor for governance. This also meant that the colonial masters were more focussed on ecological resources rather than the civil society which was only born later out of the colonial engagements. Kearns writes, “The economy of the metropole was projected into the colony

¹³² Gerry Kearns, “The Territory of Colonization”, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, Routledge, 5:2, Page: 222-238

but, in the absence of loyal institutions constituting a civil society for the colony, the colonial state very often extended its claim in a territorial fashion, almost as a sort of shorthand for designating a set” (225). Kearns counters the claim of civil society espoused by Elden and suggests that in colonized spaces, the idea of territory did not occur as a natural extension of civilization but was rather implemented by an outside agency.

The British administration and the missionary enterprise extended their territory to include all available spaces in the name of the Queen and God, respectively. In this mutually beneficial relationship, the British forces invaded the hills of North-East and the missionaries occupied these spaces and channelled the formation of a civil society through the introduction of education and a new religion. The British made claims on the plains and foothills of Assam, rapidly converting them into tea plantations as territory was coaxed by profit-making. Meanwhile, the missionaries simultaneously worked towards creating a civil society that would be assimilated with the changes around them. The bureaucratic and the missionary geographical imageries tended to overlook the complexities of the geography and instead fixated itself with the more conspicuous facets of plains, hills, forests, and gardens. The North-East as an identifiable area, too, emerged from the various engagements of the British Empire, the missionary enterprise, and the vernacular literature in establishing its ecological parameters. Indeed, the fusing together of seven separate states with their hundreds of dialects and as many variations of culture into a compact “North-East” itself is a testament to the way in which representations dictate the identity of a place even today. The finer details related to its ecological structure fades to the background whereas the more obvious indicators such as lowlands, highlands, tea gardens, and the Brahmaputra become the prominent highlights in solidifying the idea of the “North-East” in public consciousness.

5.7 Discovering history through geographical imaginings

If the literature of eighteenth and nineteenth century used the geography of Scotland to recreate its history; missionary archives also narrated the historical stage of a community based on its geographical markers. For instance, the altitude of the particular community's settlement established its level of "barbarity" with those living on perilous peaks seen as substantially more uncivilized than those in the plains and the foothills. Tribal communities from these hilly regions were treated as objects of wonder by the missionaries who were fascinated by their clothing, accessories, and tattoos. These hill tribes were also considered backward due to their inability to utilize the abundance of natural resources around them. Their architecture, where they built bamboo huts with thatched roofs, neither required modern construction material, nor did they sell timber for profit purposes. The tribal groups didn't transform land into a commercial enterprise save cultivating essential food grains, vegetables, and cotton for self-consumption. At best, they would barter their produce at the monthly markets set up at the foothills. The missionaries found that the under-utilized geography of the hills stood in sharp contrast to the plains where the British had appropriated the land and transformed it into rolling plantations of tea. The coming up of such plantations led to the growth of towns such as Dibrugarh, Goalpara, and Tezpur thereby changing the landscape. Not only that, the British had brought in labour from Bengal and Jharkhand to work on these plantations thereby adding a new demography to the mixture. Identified as "coolies", the missionary enterprise found much success among these tea cultivators in terms of proselytization.

The drastic change in the geography, and the coming of labourers from other parts of the country created circumstances where the indigenous Assamese needed to seize their history and establish their dominion over the local landscape. According to Jayeeta Sharma, the newly educated Assamese youth found their voice through the othering of the new demography and

“imagined” themselves as an “Indo-Aryan” community that was separate from the aborigines of the hills as well as the coolies with whom they shared a territory (9).¹³³ In her work, Sharma engages with the colonial fixation of transforming Assam into a tea-producing province or the conversion of “nonproductive spaces into productive gardens” (10). According to Sharma, the evolution of the jungles of Assam into the Empire’s Garden made colonial occupation of the place a fruitful enterprise and also fit into the narrative of modernity that was heralded by the Raj.

For the Assamese youth, the geographical and administrative changes meant an improved access to colonial education and later on to government jobs. Sharma writes, “Assam’s development as an imperial tea garden fostered hopes among its élites that all-round prosperity would follow” (167). The young men of Assam travelled to Calcutta to receive education at colonial educational institutes and were touched by the nationalistic fervour where carving out an Assamese identity became imperative. They returned to Assam, took up administrative jobs, and started local movements for reviving Assamese “culture”. Sharma writes, “As college-educated youths returned to Assam, now valourized as their beloved motherland of *Asomi Aai* (Assam the Mother), they presented themselves as modern representatives of Assam and India” (9). Assamese nationalism became an arena through which further rifts could be created between themselves and the hill population whose lands were still wild, unproductive, and remote. Whereas Assam began to emerge as a household name around the world for its quality tea, the rest of the North-East was still seen as wild. The prosperity of Assam, though accumulated into the hands of the British, would rank societies as backward and modern in comparison to each other as well as Europe and America. Due to its connectivity and proximity, the geography of Assam was transformed before any other state around it giving

¹³³ Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire’s Garden: Assam and the Making of India*, Duke University Press, 2011.

it a head start in removing the tag of backwardness. With the development of Assam into an “imperial garden,” the British rapidly improved road and railways to the tea growing areas thereby connecting Assam to the rest of India.

The hills received roads and railway much later making their access to ‘modernity’ and civilization slower. The missionary archive is filled with references to the difficulty with which the earliest members accessed the hills. *A Corner in India* carries an illustration of Mrs. Mary Mead Clark being carried on the back of a tribal man on its front page. Whereas the plains of Assam could be explored on foot, the hills were too dangerous and slippery for Mrs. Clark to climb by herself. From this perspective, the geography of North-East ascribed stages of evolution onto the population of the North-East in which areas without roads were seen as an uncivilized periphery. Raile Rocky Ziipao writes that “it became the responsibility of the British in India to civilize the tribes by building roads, administering and taxing them, creating military posts, and proselytizing them, among others”.¹³⁴ By 1884, the British had constructed roads from Guwahati to Kohima (Nagaland) bringing the hills closer to the plains. This paved the way for rapid communications between the inhabitants of the hills and those of the plains. It also connected the hills of North-East to the rest of India and opened up trade and education.

The missionaries now found it much easier to commute to their ‘fields’ and reach out to the ‘barbaric’ clans and convert them to Christianity. Whereas the British annexed the hills and built roads for security and profit, it was left up to the missionaries to create a civil society that would be respectful of the state-making processes and partake in it. The Christian fields challenged the “statelessness” of the hill population by providing a miniature zone of modern governance where security and disciplinary practices sought out the creation of a population that would latch on to the idea of nationhood.

¹³⁴ Raile Rocky Ziipao, “Roads, tribes, and identity in Northeast India”, *Asian Ethnicity*, 21:1, 2018, Pages 1-21.

5.8 Geography in missionary narratives: A study of *Korno Siga: The Mountain Chief*

Korno Siga, The Mountain Chief; or, Life in Assam (1889) was written by Mrs. Anna Kay Scott under the pseudonym of Mrs. Marston. It is one of the few books whose title is dedicated to a native individual. In this fictionalized memoir, she narrates the story of Korno Siga, an 18-year-old boy from the hills, who comes to the missionaries in search of spiritual fulfilment and finds his calling as a Christian preacher in later years. The book also narrates other experiences of proselytization, struggle, and loss faced by the writer.

Mrs. Scott recalls meeting Korno Siga for the first time in her “home on the mountains” (56) where the “wild, unkempt” boy emerged from the shadows of the jungles with a question on his lips, “Are you the white teachers?” (67) Korno tells them that he came to the mission compound to learn more about the religion of the white man and “what it can do for a rude mountaineer” (68). Growing up, the tribal youth had been taught to worship the trees that circled the hills. However, when he lost his foster mother to an illness, he found that his indigenous religion could not cure the sorrow in his heart. In order to search for some meanings in life, Korno Siga leaves his village to first seek solace in Hinduism and later on in Islam. He is disappointed on both occasions after witnessing that the Hindu guru was “exacting and unmerciful” (72) and that the Muslim teacher was “wicked and licentious” (74). He then finally decides to journey to the missionary compound to seek answers and find the spiritual guidance he had been craving for. Korno is admitted to the missionary school and becomes one of its brightest pupils. When he grows older, he marries a female student of the mission, and goes back to his village with her to carry forward the message of the gospel.

Mrs. Scott keeps many of the details vague as the narrative is a fictionalized version of her life. She does not reveal the name of Korno Siga’s village or his tribe, strictly describing him as a “mountain man” who later rises up in ranks and becomes the chief of his village. It is

only in her later work, published after nearly thirty years, that she names the places where she worked at. In the book *An Autobiography of Anna Scott, M.D: Twelve Years a Missionary in Assam, and Twenty-five Years a Medical Missionary in China* (1917), Mrs. Anna Kay Scott reveals that she and her husband were first posted at Nowgong, Assam, where they worked alongside the Bronsons for some time. Later they shifted to a “mountain home” in the Mikir Hills which today forms part of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In this latter text, there is no mention of Korno Siga but she briefly references a Mikir boy called Sar Doka who joins their school and in later years becomes a teacher among his people. Sar Doka may have been the inspiration behind *Korno Siga*.

5.8.1 The civilized versus heathen dichotomy

Mrs. Scott’s work vividly engages with the geography of the North-East in its different landscapes, altitudes, and changing seasons. She describes Assam as a mine of natural resources with its raging Brahmaputra, its fertile soils that grow rice and tea, and its vast forests filled with valuable trees. North-East is also rich in coal and rubber that adds to its economic potential. Mrs. Scott is enamoured by the breath-taking Himalayas and exclaims that it is “one of the grandest sights eye ever gazed upon. It presents the appearance of a beautiful city with golden spires and domes” (41). She describes the tea gardens as “beautiful” and writes that she has many a times watched them for “study and admiration” (152). Amidst the beauty and richness of the place, Mrs. Scott however realises, that nature’s boon is offset by the distance from civilization and the dangers of the wild such as beasts, diseases, insects, and tribes of dangerous people.

The forests of North-East India come off as dark and dangerous when contrasted against those of America. Mrs. Scott’s work contains two brief stories of her engagement with forests—one in America and one in Assam—where she juxtaposes the difference in civilization between the two. The first trip takes place while she was a young girl in America and goes to

visit her uncle's family. She and her cousins spent many "pleasant days" fishing, hunting, and exploring the caves nearby. The group of "large and gay company" also visited a church located in a "grand old forest", charmingly described as "wood" to highlight its idyllic nature (14). It is in this church that the maiden Anna meets her future husband, Mr. E. Scott, who happened to be delivering the sermon that day. The two devout people carry their correspondence forward and get married soon afterwards.

Mrs. Scott's next experience of a forest takes place sometime later when she had left America and had reached Assam. In this part of India, she finds that the forests are dangerous places for humans to enter: "Wild animals abound in the dense jungles, and human life is not safe while travelling even short distances" (55). She and her husband, along with native and tribal helpers, had to travel to the Mikir Hills to establish a station. In contrast to her foray into the woods of America where the days were tinged with fun and frolic, the trip to the hills of North-East was ridden with fears of cholera, bugs, and wild animals. In the absence of proper roads, both husband and wife had to be carried in baskets by the "wonderfully strong hill men" on their backs (56). Mrs. Scott uses the term "wild" to denote the forest as well as its inhabitants.

Here, Mrs. Scott and other early missionaries found a canvas where they could paint a place to come to existence in their literature. Unlike the romance and security of the forests of America, the hills of North-East were portrayed as unpredictable and unsafe. The jungle does not discriminate between native and foreigner as both are prone to catching cholera and fever. Mrs. Scott presents the North-East as a mix of beauty and danger as she narrates many tales of how the forest comes alive with its diseases and wild beasts. Once, she and Korno Siga managed to barely escape from a buffalo attack by hiding themselves behind a boulder in a river and then waiting for a native boat to rescue them. On innumerable times, the mission bungalow plays host to uninvited serpents and snakes who coil under the beds and in nooks

and corners. Then there are the “white ants”, an absolutely nightmare that attacks and eats into the furniture of the white household. If this was not enough, Assam suffers a devastating earthquake leading to damage all around.

The challenge comes not just from the different wild beasts that roam the hills but also the inhabitants who share a similar affinity to violence. In her journey from to India, Mrs. Scott witnesses the four stages of civilization in the descending order of America, Bengal, Assam, and the hills of North-East. It is in the place at the bottom of the civilizational graph that they have to establish a church and set up the kingdom of God. This earmarking of space for God dictates the engagement with geography as missionary narratives portray the difficulty with which this territory is achieved.

Geography also determined the characters of its inhabitants. Despite their violence, Mrs. Scott bestows the hill people with “warmth and kindness” (56) as opposed to the cunningness of the Hindu people of the plains. Mrs. Scott narrates the commonly accepted theory that the hill people were the original natives of the plains but were forced to flee to the higher altitudes due to wars with the Aryan invaders who occupied the plain lands. She portrays the natives of the hills as honest, strong folks and insists that had the wars been fair and based on physical prowess, the present-day hill folks would have had the upper hand, but “when treachery and intrigue were brought to bear upon them they were outwitted by the crafty Hindoo” (51). Added to this division was the issue of racial differences between the residents of the Brahmaputra valley and those of the hills. A portion of the plains people or the “Assamese” were deemed to be of Aryan descent who came to rule over the plains whereas the rest were of Mongolian descent who had moved to this part of the world from China and Burma in ancient times. As such, Mrs. Scott and other missionaries before and after her created a dichotomy in their works where the hills and the plains were differentiated on the basis of altitude, race, and morals.

5.8.2 Korno Siga and Christian salvation

The story of Korno Siga, the heathen-turned-Christian pupil becomes the physical embodiment of the hills. Just as the missionaries travelled to the hills and tamed them through the construction of a mission compound, they found a rough and wild Korno Siga and polished him into becoming a refined native. Both stories run parallel to each other as the development of Korno Siga is mirrored in the strengthening of the educational institution set up by the Scotts. From being a wild, unkempt boy, Korno Siga quickly rises up the ranks. From the time he joined the missionaries as a student, he spent much of his time poring over his studies and learning the Bible by heart. Korno Siga is interested in studying world religion and finds out that for every lesson taught in the Quran and the Hindu texts, Christianity had something better to offer. Meanwhile, whereas the Scotts started their mission school with just a few pupils, it soon grew into a full-fledged institution over the years. The children were taught Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, and History. Students who passed out of the school went on to become either government servants or church workers.

Upon first visiting their “hill home,” the Scotts notice that the distance between heathenism and civilization increases as they move further into the forests. Mrs. Scott notes that farther North, “A savage, warlike tribe inhabited the hills” who had murdered “English officers one after another,” (58). She establishes the interiors as dangerous and uncouth where the tribes are more violent than those living on the foothills. There are no proper roads leading to these interiors and barely any mode of communication. This posed a challenge to the missionary enterprise as they had to establish a link between themselves and the tribes that lived farther away. Opening schools and creating a tribe of educated indigenous preachers became the means through which the Kingdom of God could be achieved. The figure of Korno Siga becomes an important one as he fills in the gap between missionary target and

achievement. Like other native converts such as Ramkhe, Godhula, and Nidhi, Korno Siga serves as the bridge between the missionaries and the members of his native tribe. He would visit his village and bring back new students for the school. “Personally, I will add that I have never known a heathen who lived up to all the light he had received” Mrs Scott reminisces (95).

Korno Siga’s journey from heathenism to Christianity finds a befitting companion in the form of Kache, a hill woman who joins the school and later marries him. Together, they go back to Korno Siga’s former village in the mountains where they take on the role of the native missionary couple who dedicate their lives to converting their neighbours. Mrs. Scott narrates an interesting tale of how during one of the couple’s travels in the wild, they reach a heathen village where they decided to spend the night. Barely had they fallen asleep that they were awakened by the hymns of the villagers. On further query they found out that Korno Siga and Kache had visited the village earlier and taught them these songs thereby sowing the first seeds of Christianity. The kingdom of God thus widens its jurisdiction through the effort of numerous local natives who were keen on replicating the lives of the white missionaries.

5.8.3 Of filth and taboo

In addition to the dangers of the wild, Mrs. Scott develops the idea of North-East as a place where filth finds its way on human bodies, homes, and water. She frequently uses imageries of dirt and pollution to create a divide between herself and the rest of the population. Her observation of filth begins with the river journey from Calcutta to Assam where her steamer is filled with over 500 migrant workers or “coolies” who are dirty and wretched (36). The “children of the jungle” are “wild, ignorant, and filthy” (53) whereas a girl who comes to the mission for help is “the filthiest of all filthy creatures with vermin creeping over her” (100). Indeed, “vermin of all kinds live luxuriously” on the bodies of people and creep out of them

when they take a seat inside the mission bungalow (54). Other nuisances such as fleas and white ants make life terribly tough for the newcomers.

Mrs. Scott reserves her biggest disdain for the Brahmaputra which is used as a graveyard by the masses. She notes that the native Assamese believed that bodies that are thrown in the river achieve salvation. During cholera season, she remembers counting over a hundred corpses being thrown in the water with the hopes that these dead men and women would be reborn in a higher form. “To be thrown into this sacred river is to the Hindoo mind a sure guarantee of a better state in the next transmigration of soul” she writes (41). In her autobiography she once again mentions the ritual and writes that it was not uncommon to see people drinking water next to a bloated body.¹³⁵ Newcomers from America found it difficult to have a good night’s sleep on the boat for fear of the crocodiles who could be heard snapping their jaws nearby. In addition, whereas the natives consumed the river water directly, the missionary wives, on seeing the condition of the water, boiled it before consumption.

As the years passed, the Brahmaputra began to be harnessed and the British banned the ritual of bodies being thrown into the river. Mrs. Scott who was one of its ardent supporters writes, “Thus the river water which every one drinks (there are no wells in Assam) has become purer” (43). Purity in all its forms were appropriated by the missionaries who claimed to be pristine, and hence more civilized. Here, it may be appropriate to introduce the concept of “taboo” as proposed by Christopher Herbert in his analysis of Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*.¹³⁶ According to Herbert, in the nineteenth century, during the rise of industrialization, London could be divided into areas occupied by the bourgeoisie and areas

¹³⁵ Anna Scott, *An Autobiography of Anna Scott, M.D: Twelve Years a Missionary in Assam, and Twenty-five Years a Medical Missionary in China*, 1917.

¹³⁶ Henry Mayhew was a journalist who is well-known for his nineteenth century survey of London’s poor districts and his minute descriptions of their living conditions. His works appeared in newspapers and were later compiled into a book series *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851). Christopher Herbert analyzes his writing in the essay “Rat Worship and Taboo in Mayhew’s London”, *Representations*, Summer, 1988, No. 23, Pages: 1-24.

where workhouses and factories saw inhabitants from the poorest classes jostling for survival. In those years, Mayhew, a journalist, engaged deeply with visiting the poor areas and churning out vivid descriptions of the living conditions in its “fantastic imagery of physical dirt” (9). Herbert writes that “examples of this motif include graphic descriptions of heaps of refuse and ‘stagnant filth’ found in the sewers at those places that ‘abound with the foulest deposit, from which the most disgusting effluvium arises’” (10). Mayhew’s fixation with the living conditions of the poor revealed a complicated relationship that Victorians developed with the understanding of filth and waste. Herbert writes that the richer class began to develop an intense fear of filth as new scientific developments had found a correlation between dirt and disease. This fear catapulted filth to the category of taboo where it was seen as a dangerous malice. First, there was an absolute fear surrounding the effect of dirt on the system of anyone who comes in touch with it. And second, there was a recognition that the lowest class is the one that deals intimately with filth.

Relegating filth to a taboo not only became a confluence of science and superstitions, but it also transferred the idea of cleanliness versus dirt into the zone of morality. Herbert writes that although Mayhew was trying to use dirt to “assault” the “polite refinement used strategically by the Victorian upper classes to screen themselves from the ugliest contemporary realities,” he himself could not escape the idea that “dirt is after all deeply impregnated with ideas of moral depravity” (12). Victorian society increasingly began to create a class divide based on cleanliness and “divinized...cleanliness and ‘purity’” (8) as another form of civilizational behaviour.

Herbert’s analysis of *London Labour and the London Poor* may help us in understanding the missionary enterprise’s fear and disdain for Indian filth and dirt summed up in the adage “Cleanliness is next to godliness”. Mrs. Scott saw the dirt and vermin on human bodies, caused by lack of baths, as a testament to their moral depravity, destitute, and lack of

scientific advancement. She writes, “They [people of Assam] were entirely ignorant of the most common laws of health and cleanliness, and we had need of much patient endurance in well-doing” (57). In converting people to the new religion Mrs. Scott further explains, “The Christian religion makes one clean inside as well as outside, and the soul soiled with sin must be washed in that fountain which Christ has opened for sin” (104). The missionary creation of North-East as a place in need of civilization necessitated a physical and moral divide between themselves and the natives. Such a divide found an easy motif in filth which became a Christian taboo and which needed to be removed from natives bodies as well as the landscape through the regulation of baths and through the conversion of wild forests into well-planned tea gardens, respectively.

Missionary narratives created North-East as a distant land bestowed with natural beauty whose geography could be optimized through Western intervention. Once the places had been created in the literature, the missionaries also simultaneously engaged with the establishment of a territory to earmark spaces that mimicked Western civilization.

5.9 Construction of a Field in *In Villages and Tea Gardens: Forty-three Years of Missionary Work in Assam* by O. L. Swanson

The Christian field included a range of geographical features, from the mission bungalow to the bazaars, from villages for native Christians to schools and hospitals. The Christian ‘field’ has territorial significations as it starts with the fencing of land with an intention to make it a permanent settlement. Missionaries would identify a suitable location based on resources, accessibility, land quality, and proselytization possibilities. Having thus agreed, they would then prepare a blueprint of the compound and decide what buildings would come up and how a settlement would be established that had the potential of accommodating the growing number of families in the coming years. The effort put into the making of a field is captured in great detail by first generation Swedish-American missionary, Mr. Oscar L

Swanson, in *Villages and Tea Gardens*. In this work he elaborates on how he built the Golaghat mission station in 1898 and transformed the neglected tract of land into becoming a productive settlement bustling with human activities.

Before the construction of the mission field in 1898, Golaghat consisted of mostly tea plantations that had been created by the British to make the land commercially profitable. It was inhabited by diverse groups of people, from Santal migrants of Jharkhand to Mikirs and Garos from the hills, aside from the local Assamese community. Mr. Swanson chose this place to build his station for its accessibility to the railway line primarily built for exporting tea. The area was also home to a large number of population estimated to be more than 20 lakh. He writes that his field was “the most progressive” as it had two railway lines and was constructing a third one that would connect the province with Calcutta” (74). The economic upheaval from tea trade brought with it “an air of expectancy in the minds of the people” making it “an excellent time for preaching the gospel,” Mr. Swanson recalls (74). Mr. Swanson spent many months in finalizing his field in which time he visited several plantations and villages, and met hundreds of people before deciding on a spot that would be suitable for setting up a mission bungalow. He also had to manoeuvre his way through the bureaucracy that had wasted no time in rapidly zoning and dividing the land to earmark certain activities. According to Mr. Swanson, the first spot he had selected had been classified as “transport land” and so he had to change his pick to another place farther away. From this vantage point in Upper Assam, he could visit all the nearby tea plantations as well as climb to the Mikir Hills for preaching. In December 1898, Mr. Swanson finished the construction of his bungalow and moved to Golaghat with his wife to start his mission. He spent forty-three years as a preacher and retired in 1936. During his stay, he helped construct a strong field in Golaghat and preached among the Mikirs and the

migrant tea workers. Such was his success that Mr. Swanson was awarded with Kaiser-i-Hind at the time of his retirement.

In his work, written in 1944, Mr. Swanson reflects on his experience of constructing a “field” and notes down the emergence of one of the Christian “territories” in North-East where he fenced a piece of land and claimed it in the name of God. The mission compound, ten-acre in area, became the seat from where he could make policies, go on travels, and channel the resources of the American Baptist Mission in spreading Christianity. The land is commodified as it can be owned, re-used, and re-sold thereby fulfilling Stuart Elden’s first condition of the birth of territory. Whereas many parts of the North-East observed a nomadic life-cycle as explained by James Scott, missionary compounds became permanent structure around which an indigenous settlement expanded. The missionary ideology, however did not limit the jurisdiction to the bounded space but branched out to the neighbouring villages and tea gardens towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God that transcends man-made boundaries. Christian territory, therefore, worked at two levels—legal and ideological. While at one level it implied ownership of the mission compound legally through judicial rights over the land, it also ideologically incorporated the space outside where the mission was free to implement its policies. A Christian “field”, therefore, referred to an area headed by the missionary whose seat is the mission compound.

5.9.1 The mission compound and its implications

The architecture of the mission compound became the representation of a civilization that the rest of the fields were encouraged to emulate. Mr. Swanson writes about his bungalow, the church, and the school building with a lot of pride as he had to go to great lengths to get the finest building material he could procure. His work carries photographs of the best structures

constructed by the Baptist Mission which includes the picture of the church and the school that he constructed at Golaghat field.

Mr. Swanson's quest for grand symbols of Christianity can be ascertained from the fact that even during his furlough to America, he spent much of his talent to persuade people to donate towards building his church. He justified his expenses by writing that his station cost less money than many others—"Many projects, properly sanctioned by big committees, have cost more money and caused more grief to our society than has the Golaghat station" (72). The buildings stood as physical evidence of the work done by missionaries and were frequently showcased to new arrivals from America.

Once he was happy with his first building—the mission bungalow—Mr. Swanson entrusted himself with the task of preaching to the nearby populations of Mikirs, Garos, migrant workers, and Assamese people. He writes that the effort of building the missionary bungalow and church took him away from the task of preaching but now he and his wife can rededicate themselves to the task of "winning the town, the tea gardens, and as much of the province as we could reach for Christ" (71). The presence of a field was only justifiable if the missionaries used the premises to preach the gospel. Every building was designed to serve a purpose. The church had regular services and the school served as an institution to train future pastors, some of whom would go back to their hills and establish more churches.

The new and spectacular buildings became symbols of the appropriation of native geography which was an important step in the colonization of the place. By establishing a field, the missionary was essentially trying to replicate western architecture in a colonial setting. They, therefore, went to great lengths to procure timber and other building material to construct the bungalows and churches that would be a spectacular piece of architecture compared to the smaller housing units of the rest of the population.

The church buildings acted as the platform for exhibiting the glory of God through the spectacular ceremonial aspects of religion. This exhibition included acclamations, singing of hymns, and offering of prayers on a regular basis. Giorgio Agamben in *The Kingdom and the Glory* notes that these activities that are shared between different people help in assimilating a comradeship.¹³⁷ He assigns acclamation such as the collective “Amen” at the end of a prayer to the creation of a “people” that would give religious activities a “public character” (174). In other words, the activities collectively carried out by the members of the church are signs of public reverence that help in creating a community that is united in their faith. The mission compound becomes the place where this unity is created and demonstrated through group pursuits.

5.9.2 Christian Territory

As mentioned previously, Stuart Elden describes territory as a concept that is sustained through the policy of “measure and control”. In the nineteenth century, this meant earmarking a boundary and implementing the techniques of security processes of statistics, research, classification, census, and climatic considerations to protect and harness it. Christian territory, too, required a similar policy in which the setting up of fields spurred the measuring of land, both for the purpose of building a compound as well as for creating the jurisdiction of God. Mr. Swanson and the other missionaries first established a field through ownership of land where the mission compound is under the authority of the missionary, who is himself governed by an American board. The setting up of such a field required calculation of geographical positioning, population census, measurement of the area of the land, and accessibility. The techniques of security required extensive generation and analysis of information about the place and the creation of means by which its productivity can be increased. This is why Mr. Swanson “studied” the province before deciding on a place to build his mission compound. Working

¹³⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Stanford Univ Press, 2011.

amidst a “stateless” population prone to shifting their settlements from one place to another, the mission compound was a solid structure that implied permanence. Many of the mission compounds that were built in the nineteenth century are still functioning today with a robust town thriving around it.

Whereas the “measure” of Christian territory was easily obtained, the “control” of this space took more time and effort. Working amidst a hostile environment, the safeguarding of territory required a deep engagement with the stakeholders—the British bureaucracy as well as the local native populations. Missionaries had to navigate a process in which they do not offend either side. To understand this “control” requires perceiving the ways in which the Christians and the imperial army used different tactics to exert hegemony over the land. The Christian missionaries often used persuasion and technologies of security to enter villages and homes whereas the army is seen using brute force to do the same. The tea estates that sustained the British in Assam were seized from the tribal communities who claimed these to be indigenous lands. Furthermore, from 1874 onwards, the British began its expansion policy through which they annexed the stronghold of the hill tribes such as the Naga Hills and the Lushai Hills. Sajal Nag writes that by the turn of the century the entire North-East was brought under the crown following decades of bloody battles and raids.¹³⁸ He adds that with the monopoly of British over the hills, they introduced commercialization of land and private landownership among the tribal communities. These changes to the land-use, coupled with the frantic building of roads, led to a transformation in the economy of the hills and allowed the formation of the middle class. By early twentieth century, the whole of North-East became an official part of the Indian government.

¹³⁸ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2002.

Meanwhile, the missionaries had simultaneously spread their religion and English education among the people. But they had done so by portraying themselves as emissaries of culture rather than as conquerors. Mr. Swanson visited hamlets and markets with a Bible in hand and set up tents in the field where people would gather to listen to his preaching. When other missionaries accompanied him, they would sing hymns and songs, and hold a “lively gospel service” (55). They portrayed themselves as markedly different from British agents through their prayer services and health clinics. If we reflect back to the *Korno Siga* scene where Edward Scott enters Naga territory as a musician, we can discern this anxiety to dissociate oneself from English bureaucracy.¹³⁹ Whereas the former indulged in what Partha Chatterjee calls the “pedagogy of violence,” the latter used the “pedagogy of culture” to extend its influence.

Between statelessness and the emergence of the territorial state, the Christian field served as a mediating experience of modern territoriality where the different tribes experienced a community that was bigger than their individual villages. James Scott points out that Christianity became an additional resource for “group formation” by “maintaining and emphasizing hill-valley distinctions” (320). It did so by becoming a microcosm of nation building where a community is established based on language, location, race, and religion. The fields, set up all over the hills and valleys, consolidated the identity of the residents that made way for ethnic nationalisms by strengthening their communal ties and by making demarcations between the hills and the plains stronger. The use of cultural tools rather than brute force meant that many of the tribes did not feel threatened by the missionaries. As emissaries of culture and religion, the tribal communities were given access to modern social formations without feeling

¹³⁹ Please see the introduction of this thesis, pages 25-26.

that their identity was being diluted. A Naga or a Mizo could acquire education, class mobility, and gain political recognition while still retaining his/her tribal identity.

Whereas the British had already earmarked a territory and were in constant quest to extend it further, the missionaries produced the characteristics of the places in their works through their lived experiences. While some missionaries relegated the hills as containment zones for ‘jungle people’, Mr. Swanson, who established his field adjacent to tea plantations, gave it a more rural idyllic quality by calling it ‘villages and tea gardens’ which is a step above the jungles in terms of the civilizational graph. He describes the hills as “barren mountains and the wild jungles,” and the plains as “fertile” and “green” (50) thereby drawing a geographical distinction between the two. The term “garden” also implies a leisure space that is carefully planned and maintained to grow certain kinds of plants and weed out the rest of the indigenous species. It is interesting to note that the American missionaries chose the word ‘garden’ with its idyllic associations as opposed to ‘plantations’ that could bring with it all the negative connotations of slavery and discrimination.

The making of the Golaghat field encapsulates the conversion of an empty and unplanned space into an identifiable place where the amalgamation of architecture, new population, and the appropriation of geography give it its unique characteristics, both tangible and symbolic. At one level the field of Golaghat was a ten-acre compound consisting of a church, a bungalow, and a schoolhouse. At a symbolic level, it was the beginning of a new settlement, a space of sanctity, and a place of learning. It is also the centre from where the missionary can access the sheep that would comprise his flock. Which is why, in keeping with the colonial practice of exploration, missionaries were encouraged to travel and preach in the quest for the Kingdom of God.

5.10 A woman's place in *Sowing Seed in Assam*

Women missionaries had an intimate relationship with Christian territory as they were mostly confined to their compounds. They took care of the children, taught at schools, and worked as nurses at the hospitals. They would rarely venture out to preach by themselves as they mostly accompanied their husbands on visits during special occasions. But that didn't mean that they led idle lives. The memoirs of missionary married women such as Mrs. Scott present her as a central authority of the domestic world who had the task of managing the mission compound by keeping it clean, looking after the children, giving tasks to servants and teaching in the Baptist schools. They also maintained journals, translated books and wrote fiction, letters, and text books.

It is therefore interesting that single women like Ella Marie Holmes were integral to the missionary enterprise as they treaded the line between fulfilling the duties usually assigned to a male preacher as well as performing the domestic roles of a mother to schoolchildren. Holmes in *Sowing Seed in Assam* notes that she came to Assam in early twentieth century to help establish a girl's boarding school at Guwahati and spent about twelve years teaching and raising children. Miss Holmes was not a full-time teacher but was a caregiver who prepared lessons and managed the curriculum in the school as well as boarding homes. She was very fond of children and had a maternal affinity towards the many orphans she helped raise. Unlike the married missionary women, she spent much of her time outdoors, travelling with children, and making home visits. This gave her ample opportunities to enjoy the geographical magnificence of Assam and experience the best and worst of its climate. In her memoir, she calls Assam a "huge tea garden of rare beauty in the front yard of Tibet and Bhutan" (47). When she lived in the village called Hahim for some years, she remembers that she was mesmerised by its morning sun as it "creeps up over low wooden hills and drops at night between two ranges of higher hills" (134). From her residence, she could view the "western hills" with its "great

clumps of bamboos like friends waving plumed hats in greeting” (134). She adds that the “evening skies are very beautiful here” (134). Her stay in Assam exposed her to all kinds of unpredictable weather. On one occasion, she and a small child were caught in one of the worst storms the place had witnessed in years while they were travelling on a bullock cart, barely escaping alive. Another time she and two young girls lost their way in the forest known to shelter a man-eater tiger. They had to retrace their steps to reach a place of safety. In her work, Miss Holmes therefore creates Assam as a vibrant and complicated place where beauty and danger exist in equal measures. She believed that through all the hardship, her faith in God protected her from the perils.

Miss. Holmes is not enamoured just by the geography but at times she also gazes at the insides of homes—bedrooms, storage, furniture, floor quality, books on the shelves etc—of the families she visits. Miss. Holmes is observant of the living arrangement as she is tasked with managing the boarding schools which prepared girls for marriage. Miss. Holmes dedicated herself to raising girls who would replicate the missionary woman in their dedication to the domesticity of their households and to raising Christian children. Some girls were also trained to be nurses. Compared to Mr. Swanson, who was fascinated with building impressive churches and bungalows, Miss. Holmes believed in more modest and simple quarters for the children in boarding schools that would allow the girls to seamlessly adjust to married life where they would have to live in native huts bereft of modern comforts. This happened because the missionaries found that girls who were accustomed to old mission boarding houses with cement floors and iron cots could not fit back into native domesticity consisting of bamboo beds and mud floor (65). Miss Holmes, therefore, built a “modern Christian village” in a 25-acre compound in Satribari, Guwahati, where they built “typical Indian homes” of mud huts, thatch roofs and bamboo beds (66). Here, apart from school education, girls learnt how to take care of the houses, younger children, and how to cook and sew, making them suitable for marriage.

Residents of each hut competed with each other to prove their worthiness as good eligible Christian maidens.

For most of her stay in Assam, Miss. Holmes kept shifting from one place to another, staying in decrepit shacks and storerooms without much comfort and without complaints. She dreamt of settling down one day, at a mission station of her own, from where she could preach to the villagers around her and care for the children. She repeatedly calls this dream “a house by the side of the road” and writes, “All the years I spent in school-work were hounded by the vision of this house by the side of the road, and every trip to the jungle afforded new details for the dream house and the work to be done by it” (125). For a while, this dream seemed almost fulfilled after she built a two-room “bungalow” at a depot called Hahim in Kamrup District of Assam. Instead of insisting on brick and mortar, Miss. Holmes built the house out of mud with a roof of corrugated iron. She describes the process of building in the chapter “Carrying On” about how she used material, mostly from Assam to build the hut. She built two rooms—one was used as a dispensary, study, hall, prayer-room, etc, whereas the other served as her bedroom where she had a separate bamboo bed which could accommodate six children. She wanted the orphaned girls from the school in Guwahati I to live with her during holidays as they did not have “homes” to go back to. She chose this location as some of the older girls had completed their education, gotten married and were living in and around Hahim. Miss. Holmes believed that her “presence in their midst might help them to incorporate in their own home some of the good things of home-making and motherlore that they had learnt at Satribari” (144).

Her stay at Hahim was cut short by the decision of the Executive Committee who felt that a single woman should not live alone by herself in the forests. They requested her to spend six months in Hahim per year and spend the other six months in evangelistic work among the women of the *zenana*. She writes that, “From the first, many of our missionaries questioned

the expediency of a woman living alone so widely separated from colleagues” (170). The request by the Executive Committee filled Miss Holmes with “intense disappointment,” but she did agree that there was a need for a Christian representative (implied as male) or married couple at the village to oversee the native Christians so they do not revert back to old heathen habits (170). She doesn’t give up on her dreams yet and decides to move to a place called Boko when the government grants her some land for her “house by the side of the road” (190). She spends her days dreaming of its interiors and how she would fill it up with beautiful draperies, furniture, and pictures. While the house is being prepared, she rents a house in Jungakoli, where she once again goes about teaching in nearby schools and preaching to people.

Unfortunately, before her ultimate dream home could be prepared, Miss. Holmes suffered from bouts of malarial fever and lost hearing in one ear. The concerned doctors of Calcutta warn her against staying in Assam any longer as her health would deteriorate further. This news leaves Miss. Holmes shattered and she writes, “I had come to consider that all the previous years of my life had been in preparation for the service of the ‘house by the side of the road,’ so these physical developments seemed a nightmare from which I must shortly waken” (190). Miss. Holmes has no option but to dismantle her life from Assam and leave for America after a hurried farewell to her friends.

Miss Holmes’ life and experiences in Assam portray the limited freedom accorded to women missionaries when it came to building their own mission station. Compared to Mr. Swanson who was promoted and encouraged to construct and govern Golaghat, Miss. Holmes was constantly shifted from one station to another, unable to fulfil her dream of finding a permanent home in Assam. Whereas the Christian territory encouraged missionary men to go farther and explore, the requirements of safety and modesty necessitated Miss. Holmes to spend her time mostly in the plains. The one time she felt like a “missionary more than ever before” was when she was travelling from Hahim to Guwahati by cart (155). She was accompanied by

her piano and schoolchildren on this journey. For ten days, she stopped at villages and paddy fields where she would play her piano and preach to the crowd who gathered to listen to her.

In her limited space and freedom, Miss. Holmes managed to interact with many children and women and helped convert them, thus contributing amply to the civil society of the newly founded territory. Her temporary homes served as prayer halls and she invited non-Christian people to visit her and listen to the story of Jesus. She tried to augment the value of her Bible classes by introducing a projector through which she showed them illustrations related to the New Testament. She tried to mould young women into ideal Christian women by encouraging them to quit opium use and become model wife and mother, two motifs that are constant in her evaluation of women's roles in Assam. In all this, Miss. Holmes herself did not limit herself to the womanly roles, she preached and often juggled between the domestic and the world.

5.11 Conclusion

Missionary works showcased ethnic identity by giving detailed description of the different tribes that inhabit the hills of North-East. Shortly after India's independence and assimilation of North-East with India, demands for separation erupted in Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura. Ethnicities such as Bodos, Garos, and Khasis also asserted their autonomy leading to the formation of new states of Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya and the creation of Autonomous District Councils where indigenous communities retained many rights over their land and tribal judicial systems. According to many experts on the area, the missionary enterprise, knowingly or unknowingly made tribal communities aware of their cultural identity and created a new breed of intelligentsia who were keen on maintaining their separation. FS Downs writes that "Christianity tended to reinforce traditional animosity between the hill tribes and the plains people" (7).¹⁴⁰ This is because creating a community required a process where

¹⁴⁰ FS Downs, *The History of Christianity in India, Volume V, Part 5*, The Church History Association of India, 1992.

it can be seen as a separate identity from others around it. This othering was not only reserved for the plainspeople but also for other hill tribes who were linguistically different.

Barnes Mawrie argues that another reason for the separatist movements was the collective memory of marginalization at the hands of the British. He writes, “With the growth of literacy among the tribals and the establishment of higher educational institutions, the tribal people became conscious of their rights and privileges and the exploitation and marginalization to which they were subjected (134).¹⁴¹ One of the rights they harked on to was the idea of a tribal territory where they would have the power to carry on with their cultural beliefs without being forced to assimilate with the Hindu majority.

Nevertheless, the political developments of twentieth century point at the drastic change in the North-East from statelessness to a conscious cry for territory. Each separatist movement was accompanied by a demand for an area of jurisdiction. Missionary literature offers a glimpse at this change of spatiality over the course of many decades. The tribal region becomes a study in contrast—from its barbaric state when the missionary workers first arrive, to its evolution into a civilized state when they leave for America. From its chaotic inception, the Christian territory in the hills becomes a miniature “civil society” in the sense Stuart Elden employs the term. This spatial transformation mirrors the spiritual transformation of the native as civilized groups begin to demand a territory of their own.

¹⁴¹ Barnes Mawrie, “Christianity and Socio-Political Consciousness in Northeast India,” *Christianity and Change in Northeast India*, Concept Publishing Company, 2009.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

North-East India has emerged as a geographical and cultural unit that is often in focus either for its internal political conflicts or as a video reel for its scenic beauty. But before North-East became what it is today, it underwent a drastic transition to modernity that tousled many aspects of its politics, economy, and culture. This thesis has attempted to trace some of the colonial developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that could underline the context in which North-East is perceived today.

The dissertation recognizes that modernity, which started in North-East India in the nineteenth century, was sparked by colonial motives when the British annexed Assam in 1826. Thereafter, the mission enterprise soon arrived to Assam with the goal to lift the people out of their perceived destitution. Both agencies introduced new forms of governance in the area that were derivative of ideas that were already prevalent in the West. Concepts such as correlating progress with the act of history-writing, consolidating the population, and mapping territories were undertaken to “modernize” the states. This transnational movement of ideas, however, underwent a series of revisions and amendments under circumstances created by the necessities of colonization. All four core chapters in the dissertation examine the specific ways in which missionary narratives create discourses surrounding modernity, the need for its implementation, and the ambivalences that come from its egalitarian ideals and colonial aspirations.

As soon as the missionaries arrived to the North-East, they began to record their experiences and generate written histories of the place. Whereas the natives relied heavily on verbal narratives for their histories, their oral traditions began to be used as proof of their primitiveness where the distinction between facts and fiction merged into fables. In order to

correct the perceived ignorance, the mission created reports, journals, story-books, memoirs, and autobiographies to highlight that modern histories of the natives primarily began with the nineteenth century colonial interventions.

The first chapter, “**Between Fact and Fiction: The Concept of Reality in Missionary Historical Narratives,**” has offered an account of the historical narratives produced by the Baptist missionaries. As noted by many scholars including Ranajit Guha, the early stages of colonialism witnessed a massive project of history-writing. Colonial bureaucrats took on the role of historians and started writing about Assam and the adjoining hill tracts. In a similar fashion, missionary men and women who arrived in India, took on the role of historians and began to earnestly note down their observations about the natives. The chapter has argued that precisely because the missionaries had the task of establishing themselves as serious contenders of truth and authenticity, their history-writing was marked by several paradoxes. On the one hand, the missionary-historian had to focus on true events so as to maintain the authenticity of his or her narrative. On the other hand, conventions of nineteenth-century history-writing enabled them to borrow the tropes of fiction so as to produce coherent narratives. Thus, they narrate history in the form of a story with characters, a plot, and a satisfying conclusion. Another paradox found in missionary historiography concerns the figure of the missionary itself. On the one hand, the figure of the missionary in these narratives is invariably presented in an exalted role, usually that of the messenger of egalitarianism. On the other hand, as a colonial figure, the missionary and his narrative are also embedded in a highly unequal structure. The civilizational equality of the native Christians, no matter how educated and “reformed” they are, always gets deferred. This exerts pressure on the historians to be very selective about what to include in their narratives. Histories, therefore, act as parables where the narration of true events are inherently laden with the responsibility of being moral stories.

Titled “**The Manufacture of Desire: Ethnographic realism and the making of the North-East,**” the second chapter has explored a set of ethnographies. The missionaries employed ethnographic realism to closely study the local populace and make inferences about the nature of their societies. Through close readings of memoirs such as Mary Mead Clark’s *A Corner in India* (1907) and William Carey’s *A Garo Jungle Book* (1919), I have argued that missionary ethnography generated knowledge about native societies so that they could be portrayed as malleable social units which can be dismantled and rebuilt through the cultivation of new and more civilized desires. Ethnography became a popular mode of conducting “scientific” research on colonized peoples during the nineteenth-century—secular ethnographers as well as missionaries focussed on societies that were markedly different from theirs so as to create a binary discourse on civilized and uncivilized behaviour. The nascent discipline of ethnography functioned at two levels—first, writing served to reinforce the missionaries’ self-image and the civilizing mission which directly flowed from it. Second, the ethnographies enabled the missionaries to consciously reflect on the techniques of managing people.

Missionaries sought to highlight two aspects of native culture in the North East—violence and superstition—and thereby create a distance between themselves and the natives, and also to demonstrate how the conduct of the latter could be modified through religion. The writings harked on to the idea that a careful evangelical conditioning of the impulses surrounding ‘desire’ can ensure that education, cleanliness and scientific outlook appeared to be viable alternatives to the indigenous ‘heathen’ culture steeped in violence and superstitions. Colonial forces, in this case the missionaries, became conduit for the normalization of Christian values.

The third chapter titled “**The Christian Pastorate and the Birth of a Population**” has dealt with the impact of modern governance on the consolidation of the local populace.

Towards the end of the nineteenth-century, there was a sizeable number of Christians in North-East India who had begun to form communities bigger than their immediate tribes. The new Christian population could be distinguished from their allegedly heathen brethren by their conduct. They were school educated, followed the teachings of the Bible, and shunned former 'primitive' rituals. Missionaries in their works divided the natives into two sections—the heathen populace with their desires for violence and occult, and the rapidly increasing Christian populace, who according to the missionaries, exhibited Christian virtues of peace and faith. In doing so, missionary reports and journal entries recorded the formation of the modern category of 'population' as a concept and practice that shadowed the making of a colonial state.

The chapter derives its theoretical framework from Michel Foucault's work on modern governance and governmentality in which he gives a genealogy of how modern nations were shaped by their attention to and consolidation of the population. In other words, the purpose of modern government became the governance of a population so that the individuals comprising the whole conduct themselves in ways that would be conducive to the state. According to Foucault, the concept of bio-power was first formulated by the Christian pastorate many centuries before it metamorphosed into a modern form of governance. What constitutes the state-population relationship today is a derivative of the shepherd-flock metaphor that is at the heart of the Christian pastorate.

Pastoral power was implemented in the North-East through frequent expedition and close surveillance. Two institutions, the mission schools and the mission dispensary/hospital, became a source of knowledge through which the mission developed its strategies for proselytization. This chapter studies the works of Mr. Nathan Brown, the first missionary to Assam and Mr. William Pettigrew, a missionary who spent forty years in Manipur. Nathan Brown's journal entries, reports, and letters have been compiled and published as *The Whole World Kin: A Pioneer Experience among Remote Tribes and Other Labors of Nathan Brown*

(1890). Pettigrew's works have been compiled into *Forty Year Mission in Manipur: Mission Reports of Rev. William Pettigrew* (2006). These reports were originally written from 1894 to 1934 and were published in annual missionary magazines.

The fourth chapter titled, “**Imagining a Geography and Realizing a Territory**” has delved into the way missionaries expanded the idea of modern territory in the North-East. North-Eastern provinces earlier had fluid boundaries as the natives practiced shifting cultivation and constantly moved from one hill to another. The American missionaries established permanence in tribal areas by redefining spaces as more rigid and fixed. They introduced new structures—churches, mission stations, and schools—that they pitted against the local spaces ascribed with the characteristics of barbarism, filth, superstition, and ignorance. The chapter highlighted the “spatial turn” in literature in which theorists and writers increasingly began to try and understand the nature of societies by studying the physical area where interactions between people and practices take place. To that extent, geography is imagined through the subjectivity of the narratives. The fact that the plains of Assam are imagined to be the imperial tea-gardens, and the hills are ascribed with qualities of danger and chaos is a narrative function of the missionary literature. In contrast to geography, territories are fixed, tangible, and require state forces for implementation. This chapter examines the way spaces were ascribed with personalities in the missionary narratives so that the North-East appears to be a study in contrast to the civilized West. Territory is important to this understanding because any people that lacked fixed territory was also seen as bereft of a civil society.

In addition, the chapter also explored how spaces were deeply gendered in missionary literature. There were separate spaces earmarked for women missionaries that restricted their mobility. Whereas the male missionary was expected to go on heroic explorations in order to

expand the kingdom of God, women were charged with domestic duties of overseeing the mission station.

In the absence of native narratives to record the colonization of North-East, the missionary archive acts as a huge repertoire of information and observation about the changes that took place in the area. The formulation and imbrication of modernity can be found in these narratives written by missionary men and women, both local and metropolitan. Much of my thesis has been dedicated to reading these works and examining the manner in which missionary narratives espouse the necessity of debasing the local civilization to replace it with their own. In doing so, the archives reveal the branching out of missionary writing into various genres that aid the writers in convincing readers about the necessity of their enterprise.

The thesis could not encapsulate the sheer volume of the missionary literature written from various parts of the North-East and has been restricted to mainly Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland where the American Baptist Mission was very active. However, every attempt has been made to consult as many narratives as could be traced.

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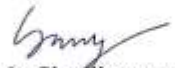
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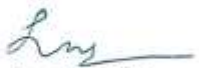
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This is to certify that Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms. Hamari Jamatia
participated and presented a paper entitled Pastoral Power and Women in North-East India

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MISSIONARY ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE MANUFACTURING OF DESIRE IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

Hamari Jamatia

Abstract

The paper focuses on the missionary ethnography of North-East India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and how it constructed native cultures as units that could be dismantled and rebuilt through the cultivation of new desires. Missionary ethnography hinged on the idea that a careful conditioning of the impulses surrounding 'desire' could ensure that education, cleanliness and scientific outlook appear to be viable alternatives to the indigenous 'heathen' culture. Colonial forces, in this case the missionaries, became conduit for the normalization of Christian values that would ultimately manifest itself in the behavioral pattern of the newly converted 'civilized' natives. To this end, the paper highlights two related notions of uncivilized behavior that deeply concerned the missionaries—violence and the occult among the natives to delve into how ethnography changed their configuration among the Christianized population of the North-East. The paper does a reading of a few select ethnographic narratives by the American Baptist missionaries who were posted at various stations such as Guwahati, Naga Hills and Garo Hills.

Keywords : Missionary ethnography, myth of boundless desire, heathen, civilized behavior, education, governance.

Introduction

The memoir, *A Corner in India* (1907), by missionary wife Mary Mead Clark, begins with a scene of struggle between a tranquil missionary domesticity and its trespassing by native hill men. While living temporarily in Sibsagar, Assam, she describes how a group of Ao Naga men had appeared at the mission bungalow one day and had tried to forcefully sell her a goat that they had brought along. Mrs. Clark recalls that despite her repeated vocal refusals, "these strange, uncivilised men down from their mountain fastness, still persisted in dragging up the steps of the veranda of our bungalow, a large, long and horned hill goat hoping to receive from us double or quadruple its value" (Clark, 1). Even though this was her first time meeting members of the Naga tribe, Mrs. Clark echoes the colonial sentiments passed down from missionary to missionary reserved for

people from the hills—that the tribals did not possess the refinement of the Westerners in their mannerisms as evidenced in their lack of respect for the missionary's privacy. Mrs. Clark elaborates, "Thus was I introduced to these stalwart, robust warriors, dressed mostly in war medals, each man grasping his spear shaft decorated with goat's hair, dyed red and yellow, and also fringed with the long black hair of a woman, telling the story of bloody deeds...dubbed by the Assamese 'head cutters'" (1). Mrs. Clark's description of the Nagas sets off the tone for the rest of her memoir where she studies the tribe in their appearance, lifestyle, and beliefs as part of the missionary ethnographic archive.

Soon after being introduced to the Nagas at Sibsagor, Mr. and Mrs. Clark journey to the Naga Hills and set up a mission village called Molung where they spend their years building the foundation of a strong church. In the early years, it was upon the Clarks to visit natives' homes and persuade the people to accept their doctrine. The role-reversal is, however, lost on Mrs. Clark who sets out to work among the people with the purpose of changing them while strictly trying to remain immune to any similar counter effect. Mary Mead Clark's memoir records her experiences among the Ao Nagas where the American Baptist Mission became a success story of proselytization and modernity. In her work she describes her first encounter with the Naga natives and narrates the latter's subsequent journey from a state of barbarity to a state of civility. In doing so, the memoir becomes an ethnographic study of the Nagas by taking a close look at their lives in their natural habitat. She describes their homes, agriculture, travel, hunting expeditions, weddings and death rituals.

The Clarks joined the rest of the mission workers who had arrived before them, in targeting the indigenous life on the basis of its cruelty, superstitions, filth, violence and polygamy. The missionaries inferred the inferior "nature" of the indigenous population by observing the conduct of the individuals and groups and by noting the various ways in which the tribal men and women failed to live up to the standards of what they touted to be their own superior missionary civilization. This comparison and the resultant evangelical preaching led to a reform movement that brought about rapid drastic changes in lifestyle of the natives. These changes manifested themselves in a rise in literacy, a new taste for cleanliness, and an abstinence from heathen rituals.

The paper argues that missionary ethnography, in this case, that of the American Baptist Mission, coaxed and sustained the discourse that its object—the savage natives—formed a society that could be dismantled and rebuilt using modern management tools. This construction of culture around colonized subjects hinged on the idea of human 'desire' as a central force that can be shaped and designed in such a way that a community can be persuaded into reform. The essay understands "desire" as a strong inclination towards certain ideology, self-image and symbolism that ultimately dictates the conduct of the individual and the community. This understanding emerges from the works of Michel Foucault who defines desire as the primary mechanism that determines the action of the individual/population. Foucault defines desire as "the pursuit of the individual's

interest", claiming that every individual "acts out of desire" (101). He adds that this desire, which appears to very natural, is open to certain mechanisms of power through which it can be moulded and shaped. In missionary ethnographic realism, one can observe that a careful conditioning of the impulses surrounding 'desire' ensured that education, cleanliness and scientific outlook appeared to be viable alternatives to the indigenous culture portrayed as illiterate, wild and barbaric. Colonial forces, in this case the missionaries, became conduit for the normalization of these values that would ultimately manifest itself in the behavioral pattern of the natives as good Christians.

To achieve this objective, the missionaries targeted the symbolism of tribal rituals, and redefined the concepts of masculinity, femininity, and respectability among the new covert communities. Through the very act of recording the culture of the tribes of North-East, the missionaries sustained a discourse that validated their need to introduce the civilizing project by comparing themselves to the 'other' or the tribals who they deemed inferior. In other words, ethnography provided the platform where the missionaries could study their own self-image against that of the tribes and encourage the othering of the native cultures. In this essay, I highlight two related notions of uncivilized behavior that deeply concerned the missionaries—violence and the occult among the natives to delve into how ethnography changed their configuration among the new population of the North-East.

The paper focuses on selected works of American Baptist Mission workers stationed in parts of North-East India. Apart from *A Corner in India*, this paper shall study *A Garo Jungle Book* (1919) by missionary William Carey and *The Whole World Kin* (1890), a collection of papers and letters by Nathan Brown and wife Eliza Brown, the first missionary couple to Assam. In addition, a few excerpts from *Assam Mission*, a collection of papers presented by missionaries at the Baptist Mission Jubilee Conference in 1886 have also been included.

The Missionary as Ethnographer

The missionaries' purpose of living in colonized lands was to convert the population. But, conversion first required knowing the people one was tasked to work among. This meant that missionaries had to routinely engage with and observe the different peoples of the area. Thus, American missionaries working in North-East India, much like the missionaries in the rest of the world exhibited an ardent engagement with ethnographic study. They spent many years and decades living in close proximity with the natives and undertook a close study of their lives. They attended weddings, visited the sick, and witnessed harvest and burial ceremonies as viewers. Annette Rosenstiel, in an essay, argues that the missionaries were the first individuals to take a scientific approach to ethnography and establish it as a discipline. By scientific approach, she meant that the missionaries converted the study of cultures into a discipline in which they judiciously kept a record of their observations and drew inferences that

would help them establish a church among the new people. The missionaries also learnt the native language, published their findings and indulged in 'participant observation' technique in which they partook of the cultural activities under study. Rosentiel opines that some missionaries such as William Carey¹, also promoted non-ethnocentrism. She quotes Carey as writing: "The missionaries must try to understand their (the natives') moods of thinking, their habits, their propensities, their antipathies, etc. This knowledge may be easily obtained by reading some part of their works, and by attentively observing their manners and customs" (108). According to Rosentiel, Carey emphasized the importance of the missionary being "one of the companions and equals of the people to whom he is sent" (108). In other words, the missionary ought to display the spirit of egalitarianism that the missions were originally established for.

Yet, despite Rosentiel's insistence that missionaries were instructed to treat the natives as equals, there seems to be a marked difference between theory and practice. Missionaries arriving to the North-East felt no affinity towards the "animists" who they deemed to be peoples without history, culture and literacy. Nathan Brown, the first American Baptist missionary to reach Assam describes the Singpho tribe thus: "They seem to be perfect savages, entirely in the state of nature, having no books, and are even without a written character to express their own language" (118). He had earlier referred to savages of India as similar to those of Burma, "There are the Singphos, the Miris, the Mishmis, the Abors, the Nagas and other savage tribes, some of whom are in a state very similar to the Karens, and have no written language or books. Here is the spot for missionaries to go in, and sow the seed of life" (111). In his writings, Nathan Brown established himself as an agent for the nineteenth century civilizing mission that would go on to teach the natives how to lead a civilized life. Other missionaries such as A. K. Gurney, who was in-charge of Sibsagor field in the 70s and 80s maintained that there will always be a hierarchy between them and the natives. He states:

Our modes of life, habits and thoughts are different from those of the native Christian. There is a great gulf between them and us. Our position is much above them. We cannot avoid this. We cannot bring ourselves down to them or lift them up to us... The missionary in education and knowledge is far above his native brother, and he belongs to the conquering race, the English and Americans being all the same to a native.... The missionary is so great in the eyes of his native brother, and the latter feels so inferior in knowledge and wisdom that he does not feel like taking the lead when the missionary is near but instinctively waits for him. (*Assam Mission* 119)

The reflection by Mr. Gurney exposes some of the ambivalence associated with missionaries as ethnographers. The writers recorded natives' cultures from a vantage point of view and could not help having a condescending attitude towards it. They seem to solidify the understanding of ethnography as an "invention" of cultures where one's own identity dictated the interpretations of alien societies. Roy Wagner in his analysis of culture writes that in some way, an ethnographer "invents" the culture he works with as he "finds new potentialities

and possibilities for the living of life" (13-14). Here, "invention" does not mean that the culture did not exist prior to the ethnographer's arrival, but that it is made "visible" by the ethnographer's focus on its "distinctiveness" that marks it as similar or different to his own culture. Wagner declares that what the ethnographer sees as unique about different culture stems from his "use of meanings known to him in constructing an understandable representation of his subject" (16). In short, culture is studied through culture. Wagner briefly adds that the difference between a missionary ethnographer and a secular ethnographer falls in the realm of "relative objectivity." The anthropologist, in spite of his cultural background, is supposed to "adjust" to foreign cultures and study it objectively whereas a missionary is understood to use his bafflement to view anything native as "cussedness and slovenliness, thus reinforcing their own elitist self-images" (16). In other words, a missionary fails to look at native culture beyond the trappings of his own culture.

It is no surprise then that twentieth century post-colonial critics have been critical of ethnography and have accused missionaries of acting as catalysts for colonization. According to James Buzard, the notion of culture has been criticized for being an "essential tool for making other," in which a line is drawn between the civilized and the uncivilized where the latter is seen as an appropriate subject for cultural intervention (3). Culture divided the native population into "readily governable thought packets" that came handy in their "control and regulation" (4). The study of culture, therefore, became an imperial project to make the otherwise "barbaric" people easier to govern.

Ethnography in the Nineteenth Century

In addition to James Buzard, the paper derives much of its understanding of ethnography from the works of Christopher Herbert who has analyzed the way nineteenth century developed and treated the concept of culture. Herbert in *Culture and Anomie* (1991) writes that ethnography as a discipline for the study of culture had just begun to become more distinct as a field of enquiry in the 1860s. This was due to the colonization of Polynesian countries which created a need for the study of the new populations that had come under the Victorian sovereign's control. British bureaucrats and anthropologists began to take an interest in the lives and beliefs of the natives' they were administering. By developing ethnography as a discipline, the colonizers presented foreign cultures in a state of distress that required reform. According to Herbert, the earliest ethnographers noticed that colonized societies were "inferior" in stature as they did not have the refinement that the British middle class exhibited. The Polynesian society was seen as a system of "excess" in which basic human passions were left unregulated. Under the colonial eyes, this perceived exhibition of unbridled senses was seen a symbol of depravity. Herbert argues that the nascent discipline of ethnography hinged on the consciousness that the way a society treated "desire" determined its position in the evolutionary graph of humankind. This meant that colonized societies, with their display of unbridled passions, were inferior to the British

society that had learnt to cultivate a restraint or a control on desire, thereby marking itself as a superior civilization.

Herbert goes on to elaborate that this importance of "desire" as a marker of inferior and superior civilization had its inception during the evangelical revival movement that had engulfed Britain between eighteenth and nineteenth century. Under the leadership of Methodist John Wesley, the reform movement created and sustained the belief that the nature of man when left unregulated can prove dangerous. John Wesley asserted that all men were born carrying the symbols of the original sin in which Adam and Eve fell from God's grace as a result of their lack of control over their desires. Thus, man in his natural state exhibited "the image of the beast, in sensual appetites and desire" (31). Wesley's "mythology of sin" became the basis on which the fetishes of "self-control, discipline, work, 'purity,' resignation, self-abnegation" (32) were built in the Victorian culture under the insistence that desires had to be kept under constant scrutiny. This understanding led to the escalation of desire into a moral category in which man's morality could be gauged through his ability to suppress the beast within. Hence, with the spread of the imagery of man as inherently fallen, the evangelist divided his nature as a "figurative imagery" into the twin category of sin and salvation. What made the situation incongruous was that while religion required docility, it also required an "intense cultivation of desires" (35) in the form of passionate worship rituals. Herbert writes that desire, both encouraged and forbidden, "must have generated as a result no small quotient of tension and ambivalence" (35). Nevertheless, by inculcating the suppression of desires as a necessary precursor to any respectable civilization, the evangelical revival created a discourse for evolutionary ethnography in which the Victorian society, with its overarching focus on self-repression, became the epitome of refined culture. Herbert, therefore, argues that society orchestrated the formation of culture by controlling desire impulses among individuals and groups. He writes that society does not serve as "an expression of immanent natural, divine, or semiological order", but functions as "an artificial restraint imposed by necessity upon volatile, uncontrollably self-multiplying individual impulses and desires which in a state of unimpaired freedom, could any such state exist, would act without limit" (35). In other words, the formation of culture simulates the construction of individuals and exhibits itself in the form of their conduct by dictating and moulding their desire. Superior civilizations claimed to function under "social restraint" in which individuals who exhibited a heightened sense of self-control became elevated in comparison to the beasts of the wild, which in ethnography referred to colonized societies with their display of unbridled natural impulses.

It was therefore discovered that human conduct, both Victorian and colonized, must not be left to its natural devices but can be and should be shaped through external social forces. Herbert writes, "...human desire by its very nature is keyed to the constitutive principles of a society and acts not to disrupt but, inescapably, to express and to reinforce them" (40). Controlling desire meant conduct had to be governed at every stage. Yet, control did not have to be

oppressive or disruptive; rather it worked and still works under the guise of individual freedom or liberty to conform to such laws. "In order for desire to exist in any coherent, active, and potentially satisfiable form, it must embed itself in a fully social matrix, which is to say, become directed towards objects conventionally defined and symbolically coded as desirable by human society" (50). According to Herbert, culture is not a form of control, but a "system of desire" in which aspirations are already predetermined by the society.

"The myth of boundless desire"

With Victorian society touting itself as a superior civilization, the evangelical belief in man's fallibility or original sin found its new location among the colonized societies. Herbert, who calls it the "myth of boundless desire," writes that colonization created a circumstance where the colonizers began to derive their own cultural identity through the study and evaluation of foreign societies. Learning about the cultures of different societies and portraying them as a system of excess became a way of establishing themselves as just the opposite. Missionaries in their travels to Polynesia, Africa and India found ample evidence of heathen immorality shaped by the latter's "uncontrolled following of immediate desires" (Herbert 60). Ethnography as a discipline began to create and sustain the Victorian image of the native as an "uneducated savage" prone to "anarchy" and "selfish restlessness" (62). This gaze continued to permeate across all aspects of native culture, from their traditional way of dressing to the maintenance of their homes to their rituals of death.

In their study of native culture, American missionaries too shared the concept of the British civilizing mission where the native 'culture' was denigrated for its exhibition of uncontrolled desires. The first generation of missionaries to the North-East equated native life with lawlessness, laziness, unnecessary violence and superstitions that marked them in need of a civilizing mission. The nineteenth century protestant thought operated under the belief that "civilizing and Christianizing" were the two sides of the same coin and that one must invest in education and civilization before one can effectively implement evangelism (Hutchison 65). William R. Hutchison writes that the American Mission was inspired by the Puritan phrase "errand into the wilderness" that suggested a "heightened activism—the actual transporting of a message and witness to the unknown, possibly fearsome and uncivilized places" (5). In other words, the American Mission, primarily under the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), established in 1810, shared a common ideal with its European counterparts and saw civilizing missions as a pressing requirement in the face of imperialism in which the "white man's civilization would inevitably superseded that of the less developed cultures," (64) and even destroy it.

"Errand into the wilderness" also consolidated the image of colonized societies as savage and simplified the missionaries' claim that in comparison, they themselves were organized, hard-working, peaceful and reasonable. William

Carey, the writer of *A Garo Jungle Book* highlighted that among the tribe that he worked with, "the fiercest passions held sway" (6) that led them to commit terrible bloody deeds. They consistently sustained the images of savagery, barbarity and a dependence on occult to drive home the point that the natives had not yet found the right way to live. And yet, much like Herbert's Victorian conceptions of desire, the American missionaries too, espoused ambivalence towards its treatment. Whereas they saw native desires as vulgar and uncivilized, their own desire to work among the newly colonized areas was seen as divine providence. Also, the missionaries claimed to know the difference between two sets of desires—those that need controlling and those that need to be fulfilled. This understanding is evoked in a letter that Mrs. Brown, the first female American missionary in Assam, wrote to her sister in America, where she says she is torn between two desires.

I sometimes have an unconquerable desire to see my friends once more before I die. But the Lord has been gracious to me; I should be very ungrateful to speak of trials and sufferings without at the same time acknowledging the goodness of the kind Hand that has so often given me support, and at times such sweet peace and consolation. As much as I desire to see you once more, I have no settled wish to give up laboring in the missionary field and return. (150)

Missionary thought encouraged desire for proselytization but at the same time demanded controlling other desires that would come in the way of fulfilling their mission. The missionaries lived under trying circumstances without modern amenities and support, and lost a number of lives to sudden diseases. Yet, their desire to spread Christianity made them persevere in the plains and hills of North-East, unwilling to surrender to the natives or the environment. The morality of desire, therefore, depended on the subject of its impulse. In this scheme of things, native desires were seen as dangerous and immoral as it promoted savagery and superstition, whereas missionary desire was seen as divine. Therefore, Mrs. Brown found great happiness in noticing that after their arrival, there developed a curiosity for learning among the people: "There is a rapidly increasing desire among all classes, to learn to read; and we learn from many quarters, that a spirit of inquiry concerning this new religion exists among the people" (Brown, 223). The native desire for knowledge is encouraged as it is seen as a positive impulse that will lead people to read the Bible and be persuaded to reform. This desire is also seen as a tool that will counter their ignorance and teach them the Christian way of life.

North-East and Culture

The use of "North-East" in this essay refers to the way the landmass with its seven states – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya – has come to be recognized as a post-colonial political terminology. In the nineteenth-century, when maps were fluid, much of the area we understand as "North-East" was clubbed with the Assam province. Today,

when the state boundaries have been drawn and earmarked, my primary texts are located in the three states where American Baptist missionary activities were rapidly established—Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya. The term “North-East” does not do justice to the heterogeneity of the land and its peoples. There are multiple problems in clubbing seven unique states together as if they are mirror-copies of one another. Yet, I seek to use the nomenclature “North-East” as a matter of convenience as well as part-acceptance of the way the region has come to be identified since the advent of colonial modernity.

American missionary writings seldom recognized the native lifestyle and ideology as constituting a well-defined culture, choosing instead to define them as “habits” and “customs” of the hill tribes. The missionaries repeatedly termed the natives ‘wild’ and ‘savage’ to highlight the fact that these people lived in a state of nature subsisting on primitive tools and practices. Indeed, several times in their works, the Garos and Nagas are likened to monkeys due to their flair for living in the ‘jungle lair,’ climbing trees and disappearing among the foliage at will.² The corresponding ethnography resorted to describing the natives under such titles as “The savage at home” (Clark 40), “The savage in costume and at work,” (49) “Savage worship and strange legends,” (57) thereby stripping them of any respectable civilization. The disdain for local cultures exposed the missionaries’ refusal to recognize the existence of multiple cultures around the world. In this regard, James Buzard in his analysis of nineteenth century ethnography has highlighted the lacuna of the earliest ethnographers in identifying local cultures as “the wholeness of a particular people’s way of life” (5). Instead, the discipline fixated itself with a single yardstick “for judging the development of human faculties” (5) based on the European model of civilization. Writing in the context of Victorian ethnography, Buzard notes that anthropology favoured a narrative in which “the evolution of human social forms and technologies, was committed to dealing with levels of human Culture— frequently written with a capital C—from primitive to advanced, and not with separate, relatively autonomous ‘cultures,’ differently evolved under different environmental conditions” (6). In other words, it was believed that there was only one culture—exemplified by the British society—and different societies marked a different stage of civilization, with primitive populations at the bottom of the pyramid and the British at the helm.

Through frequent labeling of colonized societies as “savage” and “wild,” the American missionaries, too, subscribed to the concept of evolutionary anthropology in which they believed in the hierarchies of civilization. The study of local cultures served to strengthen the conviction that the natives required a guiding hand to pull them out of centuries of darkness. The missionaries sought to find inspiration in some of their successful experiences among the American aboriginals where Christianity had made a marked difference. They found similarities between the hill tribes of North-East India and the North American Indians in their fetish surrounding the human skull and the human scalp respectively. They believed that just as Christianity had succeeded in reforming

some sections of American Indians, it would achieve an identical accomplishment among the people of North-East. In addition, it strengthened the conviction that certain management tools at the dispensation of missionaries were capable of coaxing heathens into embracing new desires. The flexibility of desire, therefore, became the grounds on which the battle of Christ and culture was fought.

Violence and the Occult Among the Natives

In order for the missionaries to modify the state of the natives, they needed to first break it down into multiple units. Among the tribes of North-East India, this translated into an intense engagement with two concepts that came under constant attack as motifs of their apparent savagery—that of the tribes' violent temperament and that of the race's dependence on the occult. As soon as they arrived to the North-East, the missionaries noted that the Nagas and the Garos exhibited a tendency to resort to violence in dealing with everyday situations, unlike those of the peaceful population of the contiguous Bengal. Their narratives therefore portrayed the two "savage tribes" as operating within a cycle of lawlessness and barbarism in which they mostly stayed hidden in the inaccessible hilly ranges only to appear in the plains to raid the villages or to trade in the markets at the foothills. During the raids, the raiding team would attack a hamlet and carry back "cattle, goats and dogs and not infrequently a much prized human head," (Clark, 116) writes Mrs. Clark. The American mission harked on to this image of the natives as head-hunters in most of their ethnographic writings. They detailed the manner in which this ritual was part of the native identity and how the hill villages had homes that displayed skulls as decorative items. To the missionaries, head-hunting became a demonstration of the backwardness of hill people and a threat to the other, more civilized communities of British India. Other exemplars of the violent disposition of the hill tribes included the penchant for animal sacrifices at every chance, and bloody feuds among personal enemies that ended in murderous rages.

As for the importance of occult in their lives, William Carey in a chapter titled "The Wild Men at Home," writes that superstitions guided the behavior of the locals at each step:

No journey can be taken unless the fates are propitious, no war engaged in without a sacrifice, no land cleared for cultivation without impaling a monkey or a goat, no marriage solemnized, or birth celebrated, or sickness tended, no experience of the coming of death to take away its victim, without the shedding of blood. (23)

Both acts of head-hunting and the occult happened amidst uncontrolled drinking habits. Mrs. Clark and William Carey were intensely critical of the use of intoxicants among the Nagas and Garos in which every festival and every feast mandatorily included animal sacrifice and a free-flow of alcohol. Carey recalls, "When in liquor the Garos are merry to the highest pitch; men, women, and children dancing until they can scarcely stand. A birth, a marriage, a death, the

opening of a market, the sitting of a council, the trial of a delinquent, almost any and every event serves as an occasion for feasting and an excuse for drink" (9). For missionaries and British bureaucrats, this unrestraint merriment and violence pushed the boundaries of native conduct towards immorality with one missionary in *Assam Mission* declaring, "The Garos are ruined by sin" (67). Here, one can see the "invention" of culture playing out between the missionary-as-ethnographer and his/her interpretation of native lifestyle. Through his/her writing, the ethnographer makes "visible" certain traits of the Nagas and Garos that to him/her appear distinctive due to its shock value. By contrast, the missionary sees his/her own culture as exemplar of peace and love and believes that by displaying patience and suffering, he would inspire the locals into imitating the same.

In *Assam Mission*, for instance, Mr. Mason while presenting his paper titled "Methods of Mission Work" urges other missionaries to conduct themselves in "a Christ-like love" (*Assam Mission* 102) so that the converts learn from their teachers how to augment their spiritual life. Some pages later, Mr. W. E. Witter calls on the missionaries to be "living examples of the Word....to exemplify God's love for the Assamese, Garos, and Nagas by our separateness from sin and our patience with 'the unthankful and the evil'" (*Assam Mission* 153). The American missionaries identified native life as synonymous with sin and evil with no room for subtleties. Such a stance highlighted their own role as accomplices in establishing a British government in the North-East. Their ethnography reinforced and supported the official narrative that natives were "incorrigible savages," making it convenient for the British to annex all hill territories to maintain peace and order.

The bureaucrats and the missionaries were in consonance that long-lasting peace would only come with cultural reformation, that is, if the wild desires of the savages are curbed through a culture of restraint. To this end, the government sought the help of missionaries in silencing dissent. E. G. Philips notes, "Government has not been slow to see, as the Chief Commissioner put it in his Resolution on the Educational Report for Assam of 1881-82, that 'it is difficult to convince a Garo or a Khasia...of the advantage of learning. The only lever that has been found effective is that of religion'" (*Assam Mission* 67-68). Hence, the government handed over the management of schools entirely to the missionaries in the hopes that they would be able to tame the savages. The Christian religion was seen as a tool that would modify the conduct of its converts by dismantling its dependence on violence and occult.

Towards a New Symbolic Order

Clifford Geertz writes that culture functions within the gambit of semiotics where conduct is dictated by the meaning it produces. He argues that culture is not "an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (5). To produce this meaning requires that members of a community be

aware of the relationship between action and its many interpretations. Geertz explains his idea by citing the difference between a "wink" and a "twitch," both of which are "identical movements" but which have vastly different connotations. A "wink" as a conduct is an act of communication "in a quite precise and special way," in which there is a signifier, a sign and a recipient who is part of "an already understood code." A twitch, on the other hand has no secondary function.

Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal is winking. That's all there is to it: a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and voila!—a gesture. (6)

Human behavior is therefore a "symbolic action" which is shared by members of his community so that communication can take place, and while "winking" is one of the simpler examples of it, any culture is a cauldron of "texts" that constitute "webs of significance." Thus Geertz sums up culture as "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes towards life" (89). Human actions, therefore, create meanings that can be understood by people sharing the same culture.

Keeping this in mind one can witness how an action creates two different interpretations for two sets of cultures. Head-hunting as an act is perceived as barbaric and wild by the missionaries, but among the tribal communities themselves, it served as a sign of masculinity. Mrs. Clark writes that as much as the raids by Nagas contributed as an additional source of income, the act of killing and taking the heads of the fallen enemies was linked with masculine pride and played a catalyst in men-women relationships. "Men were dubbed women or cows until they had contributed to the village skull-house. Young maidens instigated their betrothed to this bloody work, and it was woman's voice that thrilled the cry of victory when these prizes reeking in blood were brought into the village," (47) Mrs. Clark writes. A Naga man's worth and a Naga village's honor were tied to the number of skulls that the community had managed to extract from other settlements.

Similarly, among the Garos, head-hunting served to create *bonhomie* among its different members as a form of group activity. In *A Garo Jungle Book* Carey notes that the Garos "won an evil reputation of murderous raids" and routinely massacred the landholders of the plains for material gains. On their return journey from a triumphant plunder, the tribesmen would collect the "reeking heads; and filling these with wine and food, would eat, drink, and dance, chanting songs of triumph" (Carey 11). Head-hunting, as a cultural behavior, was symbolic of community prowess and therefore contributed to the social status of these tribes as an inseparable part of their identity. Nonetheless, the British government was critical of this activity and tried to ban it as early as 1822.

However, the practice continued undeterred for many decades till missionary presence in the hills put a stop to it.

For missionaries to succeed in conduct management, they first had to break the symbolic order associated with certain sinful desires that physically manifested itself in the conduct. A telling instance of this is narrated in *A Corner in India* where we witness a gradual shift in the factors that determined the making of a desirable youth. It started with a native Assamese preacher—Zilli—guiding the young men of Molung into embracing the Gospel. At first, only one youth was attracted to the new religion. But, that single young man was soon able to influence a friend and bring him to Christ. The following excerpt from a letter by Mrs. Clark records how Christianity sowed its seeds in the new village:

A religious and social reform has been quietly going on at Molung, beginning with a young man, who, strengthened by the Holy Spirit and helped by Assamese teacher Zilli, laid hold of one of his companions, and by persistent, prayerful effort brought him to Christ. Here were now two promising young men, the pick of the village, educated in the school, one, the son of our most influential village official, and the hearts of both filled with the love of Jesus, and set for the defense of his kingdom and social purity.... One after another of the young people were pressed into the ranks, and the White Ribbon Society, without the name, or buttonholes in which to wear the badge, grew in numbers and influence and power. (138)

Some pages later, Mrs. Clark writes that these boys were members of the Training School run by missionaries where they prepared “young men for pastors, evangelists and day school teachers” Meanwhile, young women were trained “to be suitable wives for such men” (148).

The above account of missionary activity among the Naga youth highlights the fact that the manly pride associated with head-hunting was slowly replaced by a pride in being Christian where embracing the new religion became synonymous with literacy, rationality, and modernity. According to Mrs. Clark, the heathen young men would spend their evenings “singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation,” whereas the educated young men who had built a separate dormitory could be heard praying and singing songs of praise. In the latter accommodation “purity and holiness” reigned, remarks Mrs. Clark, thus dividing actions into the categories of moral and immoral in which the heathen populace, with its inability to control its vulgarity became subordinate to the new Christian population that had begun to curb their savage instincts.

Education and the Shifting of Desire

What we witness here is the struggle that took place in the domain of desire and the creation of its hierarchies. When the missionaries had first arrived, the natives’ “boundless” desire was seen as the root cause of their destitution.

Education was seen as an effective tool to curb the wild desires and channel them towards more productive ones. Arkotong Longkumer in his analysis of educational policies among the Nagas argues that the mission immediately realized that if evangelism was to succeed, it had to first cultivate the minds of the people. Thus, missionary Nathan Brown prepared the *Report of the Committee on Schools* in 1853 to frame an education policy in which it suggested that schools be established for the "training of future pastors and teachers" and that only Christians should be employed as teachers with Christian books and daily observance of religious services" (Longkumer 3).

Longkumer adds that the ABFMS was channeled by the belief that "prominence of the mind and the cultivation of reason" must precede any attempt at conversion. The human mind "had to be shaped through an emphasis on education, which would 'eventually lead to the vindication of Christian truth'" (3). Thus, American missionaries wasted no time in establishing schools and enrolling native boys and girls. Soon enough, the results began to show in the shape of young men and women who had begun to reflect upon the two cultures under whose shadow they had grown up—their traditional heathen culture and the western culture—and who now realized that they were more compatible with the new Christian teachings. Hence, some of the first male pupils of missionary schools were also its first converts.

In this context, missionary ethnography focused on narrating the stories of a few converts who not only validated the mission's self-image as an empowering enterprise but they also became the taskforce for the spread of Christianity in the interiors where the handful of white missionaries could not reach. In his work, Carey narrates the life stories of two Garo converts—Ramkhe and Omed—who journey from heathenism to becoming spiritual leaders and who become the symbols of new Christian conduct in which they are able to differentiate between desires that are forbidden and those that are encouraged. These two names appear frequently in missionary history because of their enormous contribution to the spread of Christianity. In order to add authenticity to the narrative, Carey translated extracts from Ramkhe's manuscript autobiography, written in Bengali in 1886, to piece together the life and experiences of the convert who questioned his heathen faith in the wake of socio-cultural changes around him.

Carey notes that both Omed and Ramkhe studied at Government secular school in Goalpara, established in 1847, that "provided them with the equipment and opportunity for discovering the truth. It opened their eyes and awakened inquiry in their minds, and was part of the means by which they were taught of God" (52). He further narrates that as boys of the jungle, Omed and Ramkhe witnessed the preparation of more than one raid in which the elders of their village returned home carrying "dripping load of heads" (53). It filled Ramkhe with a particular fear of demons. After being schooled, however, a deeply meditative Ramkhe began to question his long-held beliefs and fears and found solace in Christianity. In his discussion with Omed they agreed that Christianity "is good in every respect" (69).

After leaving their schools and later on their jobs as sepoys, Ramkhe and Omed preached among their people of Garo Hills. They eventually set up two Christian villages in which all motifs of heathenism and the occult were banned. Omed's hut was built on the foothills where he could preach to the groups of people headed to the market. Carey notes that the hut was a "house of prayer...There are no bamboos stuck around it sprinkled with blood. No priest of the demons goes there to practice his magic spells. No drink is brewed. But there is much reading of a sacred book that sounds good to hear, and much reverent yet familiar speech with the Good Spirit, such as falls, even upon a wild man's heart, like a whisper of peace" (Carey 88). Furthermore, Omed grew a community of followers who would venture into the Rongjuli market with him to preach the shoppers about Christianity.

Omed's story confirms the missionary belief that education could play an instrumental role in countering savagery; that it could help a former heathen distinguish between moral and immoral desires. Much like how the white missionaries desired Christianity among the natives despite the dangers that surrounded them, the newly educated converts, too, channeled their energy towards the same object in the face of fierce resistance from members of their tribe. Indeed, things escalated to the extent that Omed and his friends were physically assaulted while they were preaching at a local marketplace. On hearing about the attack, the British Deputy Commissioner, Captain Morton, visited the market and warned all present that anyone who tries to harm the Christians would be punished. This saved the Christians from further harassment. Education and Christianization became a joint project shared by the British officials and the American mission. The mission converted the hill people to Christianity, making them easier to govern, and the British provided them protection from prosecution, creating a group of workers who would either become Christian teachers or take up a government job.

According to Longkumer, education also sowed the seeds for nationalism among the different tribes of the North-East by giving them a common Roman script. The missionaries rapidly learnt the local languages, prepared them in Roman script and went about translating the Bible. At the same time, it taught English at its schools so that the students could access the translations in their own vernacular. In spite of being a multi-lingual people, the Roman script was common to all, as was English education. Longkumer writes, "Christian conversion, education, and nationalism – was a vital centripetal force that fostered an 'imagined community' that brought together disparate tribes under two institutional centres: the school and the church" (9). He argues that sharing a common script consolidated the different tribes and made way for the creation of Naga identity that would later on culminate in a Naga nationalist movement.

The "myth of boundless desire" was an ethnographic creation that was used to classify the world population into civilized and uncivilized. This myth rested upon the belief that civilized populations of Europe and America had developed self-control over their basic, animalistic, dangerous impulses whereas uncivilized

people of the colonies had not, thereby making the latter "wild" and "savage". The American civilizing mission declared itself an enterprise of "love and peace" and attempted to develop self-control among the peoples of North-East so they would rein in their impulses for violence and the occult. At the same time, the mission promoted new desires that it believed were important to the spread, acceptance and practice of Christianity—a desire for learning, a desire for peaceful coexistence, a desire for a new religion, and a desire for a shared language. In other words, the American Baptist Mission did not annihilate "desire" but changed its course among the peoples of North-East. This understanding around the concept of desire prompted and sustained the evangelical discourse and helped give birth to a new population that was Christian in its beliefs and conduct.

The converts had begun to dress modestly, had surrendered many of their traditional rituals, and were rapidly becoming a literate community. The changes were brought about by missionary ethnography's discursive construction of a native population that unfolded on two levels. At one level, it constructed the 'heathen people' who the missions sought to convert into Christianity. It paid careful attention to record and disseminate detailed reports on social and religious practices, which helped constitute the natives as heathen. On the other level, it also constructed the 'civilized people' who were produced through the evangelical labor of the missionaries.

Notes :

- ¹ William Carey (1761-1864) was an English Baptist Minister who established the Serampore College and the Serampore University in Bengal. He inspired the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in London. The American Mission held him in high regard and dedicated the establishment of their organization to him. In Sophie Bronson's *A Century of Baptist Foreign Mission*, she describes Carey's work as the reason why missionary societies sprang up in New England, America
- ² In *A Corner in India*, Mrs. Clark worries that Naga school-children are prone to disappearing among the trees or the roof of some house at school time (8). Alternately, Carey in *A Garo Jungle Book* writes that during their resistance against the British, the Garos took to the trees like "like monkeys, still and invisible among the leaves," (49).

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15/12/15

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Course: Ph.D.
Subject: English

Month & Year: November'2015
Semester -I

Sl.No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No. Credits – 04	Course No. Credits – 04
			HE-801	HE-803
1	15HEPH01	Monica Kanga T	HE-808 PASS	HE-804 PASS
2	15HEPH02	Vinita Teresa	HE-809 PASS	HE-807 PASS
3	15HEPH03	Saidul Haque	HE-806 (ABSENT)	---
4	15HEPH05	Vishnu Priya T.P	HE-801 PASS	HE-802 PASS
5	15HEPH07	Hamari Jamatia	HE-801 PASS	HE-802 PASS
6	15HEPH08	Anuja Saha	HE-803 PASS	HE-805 PASS

Course No.	Title of the Course	No of Credits
HE-801	Critical Approaches	4
HE-802	Research Methods & Diss. Writing	2
HE-803	Theory of the Novel	4
HE-804	Reading Poetry	2
HE-805	Dystopian fiction	2
HE-806	Discourses on Education:18th Century Perspectives	4
HE-807	Theories of Waste	2
HE-808	Feminist Theories	4
HE-809	Advance Theories of Region and Space	4

Dated 14.12.2015

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Anuja
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UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Course: Ph.D.
Subject: English

1032

Month & Year: April, 2016
Semester: II

Sl. No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No. Credits - 4	Course No Credits - 4	Course No Credits - 4
			HE821	HE-822	HE-823
1	15HEPH01	MONICA KANGA T	AB	-	-
2	15HEPH02	VINITA TERESA	FAIL	-	-
3	15HEPH03	SAIDUL HAQUE	AB	-	-
4	15HEPH05	VISHNU PRIYA TP	-	PASS	-
5	15HEPH07	HAMARI JAMATIA	-	PASS	-
6	15HEPH08	ANUJA SAHA	-	-	PASS

Course No. Title of the Course

HE 821 Representation of Waste in Literature
HE 822 Victorian Literature: The Woman Question
HE 823 Memory Studies

Dated 13.05.2016

Copy to

Head Department of English

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HOD English
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UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

UH/PHD/CW/Exams/List3/2021/ 115

Date: 27.01.2021

Sub: Ph.D. Coursework Result Notification

Ref: 1. With reference to the Notification no. UH/DRAE/2020, date: 16-06-2020 issue by CE's office

(Recommendations of the committee constituted to look into the PhD coursework related issues).

2. VC's approval dated 23/12/2020.

XXX

The following results are notified with retrospective effect in accordance with the recommendations in reference (1) as per clause C (5) mentioned below:

5. Those who have done the coursework in the Dept./School but was not formally notified.

The Concerned Heads/Deans may submit all such records to the CE's office with justification for not having sent the results in time and with evidence that the courses were conducted and evaluated, for taking VC's approval to notify the results.

Deadline: 30th August 2020 | Action: Head/Dean Concerned

S.No	Reg. No.	Name of the Student	Sem	Course Code	Course Name/Title	Credits	Result Pass/Fail	Type of exam	Month	Year
1	16HEPH01	Boniface Gaiguilung Kamei	1	EN826	Victorian Literature and the Law-I	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
2	16HEPH01	Boniface Gaiguilung Kamei	1	EN829	Between Law and Literature	2	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
3	16HEPH02	Moumita Chowdhury	1	EN801	Critical Approaches	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
4	16HEPH02	Moumita Chowdhury	1	EN802	Research Methods & Dissertation Writing	2	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
5	16HEPH03	Rameesa PM	1	EN824	English in India: Development of Indian English Literature	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
6	16HEPH03	Rameesa PM	1	EN 830	The Indian Diasporic Novel	2	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
7	16HEPH04	Asima Baral	1	EN831	An Introduction to Dalit Literature	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
8	16HEPH04	Asima Baral	1	EN821	Bengali Dalit Literature in Translation	2	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
9	16HEPH05	MD. Samsujjaman	1	EN 828	Introduction to Life Writing	4	Fail	Regular	Nov	2016
10	16HEPH05	MD. Samsujjaman	1	EN823	Introduction to Nationalism	2	Fail	Regular	Nov	2016
11	15HEPH01	Monica Kanga T	3	EN822	British Women Poets	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
12	15HEPH01	Monica Kanga T	3	EN827	Reading Carol Ann Duffy	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016
13	15HEPH02	Vinita Teresa	3	EN833	Representations of waste in Literature	4	Absent	Regular	Nov	2016
14	15HEPH05	Vishnu Priya T P	3	EN825	On Modernity: Power,	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	2016

					Lower, Self Territory and Narrative					
16	14HAPT02	Muhammad Vasil V N	3	RS574	Region, Identity an dviolence in contemporary South Asia	4	Pass	Regular	Oct	2015

[Signature]
Controller of Examinations

To,
The Dean, School of Humanities

Cc to:
Head, Dept. of English
Head, CALTS

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ok

अध्यक्ष / HEAD
अंग्रेजी विभाग / Department of English
हिरवा विद्यापीठ / University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद - 500 046, भारत.
Hyderabad - 500 046, India.

15	15HEPH07	Hamari Jamatia	3	EN825	On Modernity: Power, Self/Territory and Narrative	4	Pass	Regular	Nov	20
16	14HAPT02	Muhammad Vasil V N	3	RS574	Region, Identity an dviolence in contemporary South Asia	4	Pass	Regular	Oct	2015

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28/1/21

To,
The Dean, School of Humanities

Cc to:
Head, Dept. of English
Head, CALTS

Colonial Modernity and Missionary Literature: Constructions of History, Population, and Territory in North-East India, 1836-1945

by Hamari Jamatia

Submission date: 14-Mar-2022 11:05AM (UTC+0530)

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