MISSIONARIES, COLONIALISM AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY AMONG THE NAGAS

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“My forefathers were the most ferocious headhunters among the Naga tribes. We were living in the Stone Age. What could we do? We were like animals. Tit for tat. We didn’t know any other way of doing things. Christianity taught us tolerance. As God said, ‘Revenge is mine.’ Had missionaries not come, maybe we would still be living like animals.”

- A 46 year old man from the Sumi Naga tribe

“It is 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.”

- Jean and John Comaroff

Among the nationalities and tribes who have taken to Christianity from late 19th century onwards, especially under the auspices of Evangelical missionaries, it is not strange or unusual to come across the kind of sentiment expressed by the 46 year old man from the Sumi Naga tribe quoted above. When asked about their history, or how they came to be who they are, it is common to hear a narration of history that moves from the ‘savage’, ‘barbaric’ and headhunting pre-missionary past to a more ‘civilized’, ‘tolerant’ and soul hunting age that was inaugurated by the ‘benevolent’ missionaries. In short, a historical narrative which has a teleology that moves from ‘darkness’ to ‘light’, from ‘sin’ to ‘redemption’, from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilization’, from ‘head hunters’ to ‘soul hunters’ and from ‘ignorance’ to ‘enlightenment’. This understanding of history, which has been naturalized over the years, is shared by most people, right from the man on the street to the intellectual in the university to those fighting political battles. It is the aim of this paper to critically examine and explain the origins and the making of such an understanding of history among one nationality group in the northeast, the Nagas, and the problems it poses towards a more objective and clearer understanding of the nature of colonization among them.

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Prior to the coming of missionaries, like many other tribal formations, Nagas had their own ways of recording, narrating and passing on their history. This was largely done through stories, songs and tales. According to J. P. Mills, every village had a body of traditions which narrated the origin of clans, the doings of their ancestors and the feasts some of their prominent ancestors hosted. While some of these stories were of “purely local interest”, some were common to the tribe as a whole.3 J. H. Hutton, in his work on the Angami Nagas, also refers to the importance of stories as carriers of history. According to him, stories were of three kinds. First, there were traditions, which recounted the early history of villages and clans. Finally, there were stories known as ‘contes’, which was not meant to be a recording or a narration of history, but a collection of fables about animals and human beings. These three kinds of story telling may not have maintained a strict separation from each other and could have overlapped.4 Many of these stories were narrated during festive occasions when the whole village came together. Some others were also narrated during a march or around a camp fire, when questions related to a particular locality or some incident of the day was raised.5 Some stories, anecdotes and histories may have also been narrated and passed on during the course of ordinary conversations, as Stuart Blackburn shows in the case of the Apatanis.6 The presence of this lively tradition of recording, narrating and passing on history, dispels on the one hand the assumption that tribal societies existed in a static, timeless void, and on the other hand the evangelical understanding that “the message of Gospel was the beginning of all things in Naga history.”7 To the contrary, it points towards a society that had a tremendous sense of history, a society that was conscious of its past and was able to live the present in constant interaction with that past.

However, from the beginning of 20th century onwards, this historical tradition came to be gradually undermined. In 1926, a much concerned J. P. Mills, a colonial anthropologist and the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, while writing about the Ao Nagas indicated: “Another generation and hardly a memory will remain of the stories and songs which the Aos have handed down from father to son for untold ages... the past is being allowed to die.”8 Mills held the missionaries and their activities among the Nagas responsible for this state of affairs. With much frustration he wrote:

“What care the well-oiled youths of the Impur Mission Training School for the foolish traditions of their ignorant heathen forbears? To bury the past is the tendency of the semi-educated generation which is growing up. Christians never join in the old songs; they are definitely forbidden to do so, I believe. A number of Ao stories have been recorded by Mr. H. G. Dennehy, I. C. S., who acted as Subdivisional Officer in Mokokchung for a year, but the book is not used in Mission Schools.”

Despite his silence over the fact that it was his own predecessors who felt the need for and invited missionary work in the Naga Hills so that it would provide security for their own economic and political pursuits in the region, it needs to be granted that there was much substance in the apprehensions that Mills and other colonial anthropologists of his time had over the impact of missionary work on the recording, narrating and passing on of history among the Nagas. To understand why and how this might be the case, it is necessary to turn our attention towards the character of American Baptist missionary project. It will be seen in the course of this paper that from the beginning, making of a new ‘civilized’ and ‘enlightened’ being out of ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’ was one of the central thrusts of the American Baptist missionary project and practice. It is in this construction of a new self that a new history comes to be written.

II

Towards the late 18th century, there began among the educated elite of New England in the United States a religious revival, popularly known as the ‘Second Great Awakening’. It should be remembered that in the 17th century, New England was the region where Puritans escaping religious persecution in Europe came and settled in the New World. As they settled in this new region, they felt it was their calling to begin a process of building a church and society that would be based on Puritanical values. It was from New England that puritanical and later, evangelical ideas took root and spread to other parts of the United States.

By the beginning of 19th century, the revival, which had begun in New England, spread among the farming and small trading communities in the frontier regions. This religious revival, recorded as an important event in the annals of American Evangelical movement, was marked on the one hand by periodic ‘camp meetings’ and ‘revivals’ that concentrated on nurturing earnestness in personal Christian devotion and life, on the other hand by

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10 Puritans were those who set themselves apart from the reformed Church of England in the name of maintaining the ‘purity’ of worship and doctrine. It not only stressed the maintenance of ‘purity’ in church doctrines but also the need to follow strict ‘puritanical’ disciplines regarding aspects of one’s social, political and economic life.
establishment of societies for taking out evangelizing missions around the world and organizing campaigns on issues of slavery abolition and temperance.\footnote{Justo L. Gonzalez, \textit{The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to Present Day, Part II}, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2004, p. 245.} Moreover, the revival popularized and firmly established Evangelical theology as the dominant framework within which Protestant Christians in the New World would conceptualize their Christian faith. Wherein, firstly, Bible was understood as an authoritative and dogmatic text which could not be questioned and which required complete and unconditional obedience to. Secondly, eternal salvation was understood to be possible only through regeneration, by being ‘born again’, which involved personal trust in Jesus and his atoning work. Thirdly, it was not only enough that one be ‘born again’ into committing one’s personal trust in Jesus but he or she also had to adopt a transformed moral conduct, develop personal devotion such as daily Bible reading and prayer, and have a zeal for evangelism and missions.\footnote{George M. Marsden, ‘Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism’, Mircea Eliade (ed.) \textit{The Encyclopedia of Religion}, Vol. 5, New York, 1987, p. 190.}

It is important to note that the instilling and spread of Puritanical and Evangelical ideas and values accompanied a certain political project in the United States. When the emigrants from Europe came and settled in the New World, they saw themselves as the ‘chosen’ people of God who have been ‘elected’ to demonstrate purity of life in church and society to England and the world. Moreover, following the revolutionary war and independence, it was also felt that they were to become the instruments of God in accomplishing a millennial kingdom on earth, which would not only involve the preaching of the gospel to the entire humankind but also “the reorganization of ‘human society in accordance with the law of God’.”\footnote{Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards (2004), p. 167.} This task would be undertaken by religious voluntary societies, various home and foreign missionary societies such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) from which later the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (ABFMS) emerges.

The American Evangelical impulse for the reorganization of “human society in accordance with the law of God” was best exemplified in the missions they carried out among the American Indians. Henry Warner Bowden indicates that conversion of the American Indians to Christianity “meant not only their accepting a new worldview replete with referential symbols and an otherworldly orientation; it also involved adopting a new ethos with unfamiliar economic routines, work ethic, family structure, the English language and untested conception of personal fulfillment.”\footnote{Henry Warner Bowden, ‘An Overview of Cultural Factors in the American Protestant Missionary Enterprise’, in R. Pierce Beaver (ed.), \textit{American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective}, South Pasdena, California, 1977, p. 48.} In other words, among the American Indians, the project of Christianizing was so intertwined with the project of ‘civilizing’ them into the ways of the white man. This caused serious cultural disorientation among
the American Indian tribes and villages, and “constituted an almost entirely new basis for individual and ethnic identity.”

In the light of the westward expansion of United States and the acquisition of new territories, and new impulses for evangelization in these newly acquired territories, the first half of 19th century witnessed a growing assertion of American nationalism and the religiously sanctioned idea of ‘manifest destiny’. The latter, according to John O’Sullivan who coined the term, was the destiny of America “to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles”. This would be done in the following manner:

“For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field.”

Following the civil war in the latter half of the 19th century, the notion that America “had a providential role to play for the progress of humankind” became much more prevalent. And it was best personified in someone like Josiah Strong, for whom there was “no difficulty in identifying Christianity with American (occasionally British) customs and then championing that amalgam as the one viable culture for anyone wishing to live effectively in the modern world.” The optimism that went with the imperialist advances of America in Central America and the Far East, following its victory over Spain, infused the missionary movement with greater ambitions. This was much reflected in the call made by Evangelical leaders of this period like Dwight L. Moody for “rescuing the perishing from the sinking ship that was the condemned world”, giving a new lease of energy to protestant missionary societies such as the ABFMS, to re-invigorate their mission work among the ‘heathen’ races.

IV

Molded by this Puritanical and Evangelical background, which ascribed providential role to the white missionary in the ‘redemption’ and ‘progress’ of humankind, the American Baptist Missionaries came to work among the Nagas in the mid 19th century and in a more consistent manner in the 1870s. Their work among the Nagas was very much part of their ‘manifest destiny’ to ‘Christianize’ and thereby, ‘civilize’ the ‘savage races’ around the

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16 Ibid, p. 48.
21 Ibid, p. 50.
world – to draw them out of ‘darkness’ and ‘barbarism’ into ‘light’ and ‘civilization’. They found the Nagas much similar to the American Indians who they worked with back in the United States, especially in terms of physical features, social practices and customs. Just as in their case, the missionaries felt it was their calling to initiate a process of evangelization that would entirely reorder or refashion the social and cultural world of the Nagas. In doing so, the Nagas were “presented with truths and technologies drawn from a post-Enlightenment world in which Christianity was inseparable from a specific understanding of civilization.”

It could be argued that this process of evangelization was largely a hegemonic project. Here the term hegemonic is being used to define that form of power which enters culture in the most subtle, silent and unseen way and that which is constituted over a period of time. Many a times, it may not even be experienced as power at all since it comes to be so naturalized within the political community. In other words, both the subject and the object may fail to identify its presence because of its ‘natural’, ‘ineffable’ and ‘taken-for-granted’ character. Moreover, because of its unseen character, hegemonic power is also nonnegotiable or not open for contestation until and unless there comes a moment when it’s internal contradictions are revealed and it has been stripped of its ‘naturalness’.

According to Jean and John Comaroff, hegemonic power is exercised through (1) control over various modes of symbolic production such as “educational and ritual processes, patterns of socialization, political and legal procedures, canons of style and self-representation, public communication, health and bodily discipline, and so on.” (2) Sustenance of that control over time so that “they are so habituated, so deeply inscribed in everyday routine, that they may no longer be seen as forms of control – or seen at all.”

Among the Nagas, the American missionaries had considerable control over the modes of symbolic production that socialized the Nagas into the requirements of ‘civilization’. For instance, they came to have control over the educational process, medical practices, the reduction of languages into written form and the production of the first literary texts, production of new notions of hygiene, body disciplines, clothing, time, history, and so on. Moreover, the control over these modes of symbolic production was sustained over a period in a consistent and organized manner, almost at an everyday basis, to the extent that it soon became part of their natural order of things and hardly came to be recognized as power. This process took place in the most mundane, silent and subtle manner that the

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far-reaching political, social, and economic transformations it was ushering in remained unnoticed. The way in which it was molding or making a new understanding of self and history remained oblivious.

From 1876 to 1955, close to 60 American Baptist Missionaries, including the wives of missionaries, about 6 women missionaries and several hundreds of local evangelists worked in the Naga Hills and the adjoining hill districts of Manipur. The number of missionaries among the Nagas was always inadequate considering the expanse of the region and the rough terrain. Therefore, much of the assistance in the mission work came from the local evangelists. While the male missionaries distributed much of their time between establishment and maintenance of schools, going on itinerant preaching tours, offering medical services and translation of the Bible and other books necessary for the schools they maintained, the women missionaries spend much of their time helping their husbands teaching in the schools and offering medical services, and instruction of Bible women.

Some of the topics of discussion at the first association meeting of missionaries, evangelists and representatives of various churches from different tribes and clans held at Molung in 1897 is indicative of some of the key areas that the missionaries concentrated on as part of their effort to draw the Nagas from “darkness” into “light”, from “savagery” to “civilization”. They included evangelization, Christian benevolence, learning to read, and changes in food, houses, sanitation, and clothing. It is important to briefly look at some of these areas in order to understand how through intervention in each of these areas, a new notion of self and history was generated, and how Nagas were made to feel at home with this new notion.

In the Jubilee conference of the Assam mission of the American Baptist Union, held in 1886 at Nowgong, the missionary stationed in the Tura region, M. C. Mason, described preaching as the foremost aim or objective of the missionary and it would be the means through which a missionary was “to show the way of escape from sin; the way from death unto life, to every creature.” Preaching was done mainly through the itinerant tours made by the missionary himself to several nearby villages and also by training and sending out local evangelists who would preach in more far flung areas. Realizing that the younger people were more receptive to what the missionary had to say, several evangelistic activities such as Baptist Youth Fellowship, Christian Endeavour Societies, Christian Life Crusades and Scripture classes, were organized among the students in the village schools and boarding. Besides, occasional student conferences and camps were also conducted. Students comprised a considerable section of the Gospel teams that were put

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together by the missionary. These teams would tour around the various villages, singing and preaching.\textsuperscript{32} Preaching was one of the most visible and open ways in which the missionary and the evangelists urged and persuaded the villagers to leave their ‘sinful’ life and grow into an acceptance of Christ and his saving grace, promised them eternal salvation if they did so and instilled fear of eternal damnation if they failed to do so.

Unlike military expeditions which burnt villages and instilled terror of the colonial authority among the people, missionary expeditions presented themselves as carriers of ‘peace and love’ that has come to ‘soften their hard hearts’. One way in which the missionaries did this was to package their message in an attractive and appealing manner. For instance, on reaching a village, the itinerant touring party would set up a camp and then the evangelists would be sent out in pairs to different parts of the village. They would then hang up the Bible picture rolls and preach for an hour or so.\textsuperscript{33} The picture rolls created quite an excitement among the villagers and the missionary saw that as an effective way of catching the attention of the people.\textsuperscript{34} Among the Angami Nagas, Sydney Rivenburg felt putting up these pictures depicting scenes from the Biblical story in his office was one way in which he could attract the Nagas to his office. Most itinerant missionaries also preached the Gospel with the help of equipments like the gramophone and the magic lantern, which created much excitement among the villagers. While American gospel songs like ‘Glory Song’ and ‘Tell mother I’ll be there’ were played through the gramophone with the missionary translating them, stories from the Bible were narrated and projected on a large white screen, often set up in front of the village chief’s house, through the magic lantern.\textsuperscript{35} Other equipments that were brought to the hills which made the preaching of the missionaries quite appealing, though not during the itinerant tours, were the piano and the organ. Missionaries to the Lhota Nagas, W. E. Witter and his wife brought from Sibsagar up to their mission station in Wokha an organ. It was proved “very useful in the work and amused the Nagas greatly.”\textsuperscript{36} All these technologies and equipments that accompanied the evangelizing activities of the missionaries marveled the villagers as much as, if not more than, the extempore preaching they engaged in. Moreover, it presented the Nagas with a taste of white missionary’s ‘civilization’ and what becoming a ‘Christian’ may be all about.

Providing modern medical services was an integral part of the evangelizing activities of the missionary. During their itinerant preaching tours, it was common for the sick to be gathered together and brought to the tent of the missionary for medical treatment. During one of the itinerant tours in 1907, missionary among the Tangkhul Nagas, William

\begin{itemize}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{32} Joseph Puthenpurakkal (1984), p. 129.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{34} Hattie Rivenburg, Kohima, in Narola Rivenburg (ed.), p. 81.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{35} William Pettigrew (1907) in Jonah M. Solo & K. Mahangthei (2004), p. 44.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{36} Mary Mead Clark (1907), p. 154.}
\end{itemize}
Pettigrew claims to have treated over two hundred patients. While not on tours, the missionaries established and ran dispensaries in the places where they were stationed. Some of the more trained medical missionaries like Sydney Rivenburg toured around nearby villages to vaccinate a considerable section of the villagers against malaria and smallpox, especially during times of epidemic. For the missionaries, providing of medical services was “quite generally and wisely accepted as one of the more effective means of gaining the attention, sympathy, and good will of the people.” Narola Rivenburg comments that going about the villages healing the sick, her father, Sydney Rivenburg, “surely and slowly won his way into the hearts of the Angamis.” More importantly, the act of healing through modern medicine was seen as a demonstration or proof of “God’s present working power” through the missionary - a sign of the power of God prevailing over Satan, a sign of white missionary’s civilization prevailing over that of the ‘savage’ Nagas.

The Evangelical practice also socialized and disciplined the Nagas into ‘civilized’ American notions of time, hygiene and clothing. From the moment missionaries first attempted to work among the Nagas, they felt the need to instill certain time discipline. Miles Bronson, during his short tenure as missionary among the Nagas of Namsang village in the mid-19th century, introduced a gong. It was felt that the sound of the gong would pervade the entire village and “bring some discipline” among the Nagas. Therefore, two times daily the gong would be struck - at ten in the morning and then later in the evening. As in the case of mechanical clocks in Tswana, in the face of the gong, the Naga Hills “had caught their first glimpse of a future time, a time when they would be made to march in step with the rhythms of an Empire whose imprint they could already discern in the seemingly innocent signs of the Christian commonwealth.”

The missionaries also made consistent efforts towards instilling principles of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘hygiene’ among the ‘unclean’ Nagas. For the missionaries, maintenance of a clean body and surroundings was one of the characteristics of becoming Christian. That is why on seeing a Sema Naga village which had entirely converted to Christianity, in 1940, one of the missionaries, G. W. Supplee commented: “I have never seen a cleaner Naga village. They are nearly totally illiterate. Their homes, their clothes, their village paths all bear testimony to their new-found faith in Christ Jesus.” Similarly, Sydney Rivenburg suggested one of his church members, a peddler, to keep commodities like quinine and

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38 Hattie Rivenburg, Kohima, 1908, in Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 104.
39 M. C. Mason (1886), p. 98.
40 Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 89.
41 M. C. Mason (1886), p. 98.
42 Letter From Miles Bronson to Rev. S. Peck, Cor. Sec. ABFMS., April 1, 1840, Missionary Correspondences, American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society Records, Burma-Assam, 1835-1900, Acc. No. 3243 (Microfilm), Nehru Memorial Museum Library (NMML), New Delhi.
44 Quoted in Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 10.
Dover powder in his kit to sell. Missionaries even included hygiene as part of the school curriculum. Sydney Rivenburg translated a school textbook to teach students rudiments about hygiene. This could have been part of his efforts to control the growth of mosquitoes which were by then diagnosed by Ronald Ross and himself to be the carriers of malaria. Being born into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s personal saviour required him or her to be a new physical creation, molded into American puritan notions of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘hygiene’.

Related to the issue of ‘cleanliness’ and ‘hygiene’ was the notion that on becoming a Christian, a convert was required to clothe himself or herself according to American Evangelical notions of modesty. In the first association meeting at Molung, on the issue of clothing, “some costume, a little more clothing” on the Naga body was recommended. Mary Mead Clark was appreciative of the fact that “the Assamese costume of jacket and body cloth is now being adopted by many who have come under Christian influence, especially the pupils in the schools” but felt weary about the fact that “the habits of the older ones are still as the laws of the Medes and Persians.” With clothing becoming a requirement to become a Christian, sewing machine became yet another important equipment, another ‘civilizing’ agent among the Nagas. As Mary Mead Clark comments about another wife of a missionary, Mrs. Haggard: “The click, click of her sewing-machine, run by an Assamese under her superintendence, sounded very civilized and businesslike on these far-away mountaintops, promising much as an elevating influence in clothing those who were gradually coming to realize their present insufficiency.” Alongside sewing machines, sewing lessons also comprised an important part of the curriculum for girls in mission schools.

One of the most important components of the evangelization process was the intensive study made by the missionary of the local language and then the reduction of that language into a written form. The missionary learnt the language with the help of a local teacher and was required to give at least two annual exams before another missionary. The result of which would be reported to the Home missionary board. The Clarks’ chose two of the most intelligent men of the village to come to their house every morning and talk with them. Each of them was given one rupee each for eight lessons. Missionaries reduced each local language into written forms with the intention of translating the Bible, other Christian literature and school text books into the local languages and thereby making it available for the villagers to read. With the reduction of language into written

45 Sydney Rivenburg, Kohima, 1908, in Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 112.
47 Hattie Rivenburg, Impur, 1901, in Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 91.
48 Mary Mead Clark (1907), pp. 143-144.
49 Ibid, p. 54.
51 Ibid, p. 85.
53 Mary Mead Clark (1907), p. 84.
form and translation came another important technology into the hills - the printing press. Mary Mead Clark refers to a printing press being brought into the Naga Hills in the early 1880s. It generated quite an excitement among the Nagas, who as she herself says, were “now eager for every new evidence of their progress civilization-ward.”

In order for the written word to be effective, another component of ‘civilization’, namely modern schooling was instituted replacing the existing Morungs, where traditionally all that a villager need to know was taught namely, manners, discipline, art, stories, songs, war tactics, diplomacy, religious and customary rites and ceremonies. Some of the discussions on education in the Jubilee conference of the Assam mission held at Nowgong in 1886 show that while the missionaries felt the need to enable the Nagas to read Bible and other Christian literature, they were apprehensive about giving too much attention and importance to modern education. Many of them, especially some of the earlier missionaries among the Nagas like E. W. Clark and S. W. Rivenburg, were of the opinion that since the primary objective of the missionary is to evangelize, in other words, preach the Gospel, it would be too demanding on their time and energy to give much attention to school education, which by itself would be unable to inculcate ‘piety’ in the hearts of the people. A suspicion of too much learning was quite strong among these missionaries and they sincerely believed that “a passion for learning may destroy true piety.” In dealing with this dilemma, C. E. Burdette in his presentation on education at the Jubilee conference, suggested that it would not be wise to entirely do away with schools as on the one hand it gave “an advantage for the missionary to offset his general unpopularity by the respectable title of a teacher” and “an advantage to have access to the minds of heathen, old or young, while in the receptive, trustful attitude of a school.” Besides, schools have always been “a good means of disseminating knowledge” and therefore, it depended on how that means could be utilized to impart knowledge about the ‘eternal truth’. In other words, as one of the missionaries among the Nagas in the beginning of the 20th century, W. F. Dowd said, school education could be considered as the “most effective means for establishing the Kingdom of God among these people” and the students as the “best way to get the Gospel into a heathen village.”

Following from this background, the aims of establishing schools were spelt out as the following: “leading the pupils to Christ and of the formation of Christian character predominates together with a third and subordinate aim of diffusing Christian ideals throughout the community.” With this aim, primary schools were established in different villages; high schools in the mission stations like Kohima, Ukhrul, Impur etc.; teacher training institutes in mission stations like Impur and Kohima; Bible schools and

54 Ibid, p. 108.
58 Education Committee Minutes, June, 1914, American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society Records, FM-712 (Microfilm), NMML, New Delhi.
theological colleges to train evangelists and pastors in Jorhat. All these institutions were supported with teachers trained by the missionaries and the teaching was overseen by the missionary himself. Many of these institutions, especially the village schools and some of the high schools received grant-in-aid and other financial support from the colonial government. For instance, the government leased out land to Rivenburg to build two school buildings, gave a monthly grant-in-aid of fifty-five rupees for the maintenance of the school, and generous grants for the printing of Bible translations and school books.

As late as 1945, one of the missionaries, Bengt Anderson reported that the school at the Impur station, one of the early schools, had a poor curriculum. The curriculum at the primary level just included religious instruction, a workable knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic and at the high school level, religious education, algebra, geometry and some Indian and English history. This negligence towards developing a better curriculum was largely because, as mentioned earlier, training students to be committed teachers and preachers of Christianity was all that the missionary expected from the schools. Because of which, there was much more concentration on Bible classes, prayer meetings, soul-winning programmes, gospel teams, Sunday school lessons, Christian Endeavour conventions, Christian life crusades etc. than developing curriculum that equipped them for something beyond becoming a ‘good’ Christian. Narola Rivenburg, daughter of Sydney Rivenburg, writes about how as soon as school was over, most of the teachers and students were immediately sent out to different villages to preach for several weeks and every Sunday afternoon, some of students spend their time in the village streets, singing and preaching. In their schools, missionaries also brought together selected students from various different tribes, who had their own distinct languages. Then with the help of a common dialect which some of them already knew and others had to learn, they were instructed. One of the principle aims of this endeavor was each of them were taught the Gospel and the importance of sharing that Gospel with others, then “through these splendid, earnest young people the one missionary may multiply his own talents a hundredfold, and the harvest is even now ready.” From all this, it becomes clear that as far as the missionaries were concerned school education primarily was a means through which their evangelization efforts, in other words their project of ‘Christianization’ and ‘civilization’, of the Nagas would progress.

Through preaching, medical work, education, development of print, introduction of new notions of time, clothing, hygiene etc., the missionaries put in place new institutions and

60 Mary Mead Clark (1907), p. 119.
64 Ibid, p. 115.
practices, which gradually replaced the old ones. No longer did the life of a Naga revolve around morungs, feasts, hunting, traditional religious ceremonies and rites etc. Those were ascribed as practices and institutions of the ‘savage’ and ‘sinful’ past. Now, thanks to the ‘benevolent’ missionary, the ‘savage’ being ‘born again’ into a ‘civilized’ and ‘Christianized’ being, his or her life would revolve around church services, prayer meetings, revival camps, Sunday schools, Gospel teams, Christian Endeavour etc. This transition did not take place in a sudden and ostentatious manner but, in a silent and inconspicuous manner, over a period of seven to eight decades.

The missionaries who were ushering this process earnestly felt that they were being ‘benevolent’ in making this transition possible. If it were not for them, they felt, Nagas would still be living in the ‘dark’, in ‘savagery’. Missionaries often highlighted their ‘benevolence’ by lamenting about how much they had ‘sacrificed’, how much luxury they were deprived of, in order to bring ‘light’ and ‘civilization’ to the Nagas. Through these lamentations, they expected the Nagas to recognize and realize how heroic their lives were. Mary Mead Clark, in her book, writes in great detail about how they were deprived of food supplies and regular mails, surrounded by emaciated and ‘unclean’ people, menaced by tigers, always subjected to fear of an imminent attack from an enemy village, and deprived of ‘white faces’.65 She admits that the Nagas often tried “to show us sympathy in our isolation” but then, these “poor creatures, how could they appreciate what we were giving up to bring so much to them!”66

However, despite these ‘sacrifices’, the missionaries also drew a certain pleasure from being ‘benevolent’. For as Hattie Rivenburg says, “There is no joy like that of leading men and women to Jesus, and it seems as if seeing these nearly naked savages trying to live right is more wonderful than to watch it in more civilized countries.”67 This sentiment was also expressed in the verses with which Mary Mead Clark begins her book:

“Mine album is the savage breast,
Where darkness broods and the tempests rest
Without one ray of light;
To write the name of Jesus there,
And point to worlds all bright and fair,
And see the savage bow in prayer,
Is my supreme delight.”

Narrating the history of missionary work among a certain tribe was an important part of the proceedings in the missionary conferences and association meetings. For instance, in the Jubilee conference held at Nowgong in 1886, each missionary gave a ‘historical sketch’ of their respective mission fields. Similarly, in the first association meeting of the Angami Christians, Sydney Rivenburg gave a brief history of the mission since 1887, when he and

65 Mary Mead Clark (1907), pp. 68-78.
66 Ibid, p. 69.
67 Hattie Rivenburg, Impur, 1901, in Narola Rivenburg (1941), p. 93.
his wife came to the region and began missionary work. All these mission histories, which were written down, narrated and popularized by the missionary through the speeches he gave, the books he published and the reports he wrote, always began with how prior to their arrival, “over all these ranges of hills hung the black pall of heathen, barbaric darkness.” Into the midst of this ‘darkness’, the missionary, sacrificing all his luxuries and comforts, came and began to preach the Gospel. Entrenched in ‘sin’, Nagas were initially hostile towards the missionary. ‘Satan’ was in control of their hearts and minds. But then, over a period of time, the missionary through his dedicated and committed work, made it possible for the “softening twilight of Christianity” to overcome and defeat the forces of ‘darkness’. And history was now on its way towards a time when “the broad daylight with its transforming power will reveal a Christianized people.”

Among other things, the adoption of this history as one’s own also became a pre-requisite for becoming a Christian. In other words, becoming a new Christian self required one to base that new Christian self within a new understanding of history which was produced and shaped through an encounter with the American missionary.

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As the Nagas who converted to Christianity by the second half of 20th century crossed 50 percent and by the end of 20th century about 90 percent, the scope and influence of this understanding of history, the presence of which was inconspicuous and ‘taken-for-granted’, also expanded and became more deeply rooted. Even after the American missionaries were forced to leave the Naga inhabited areas by the Indian state in the 1950s, the local evangelists and the Naga Baptist Church continued to reproduce the same history in their publications and evangelizing missions. For instance, a publication brought out in 1997 by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, narrating the history of Baptist Church in Nagaland, was very aptly entitled, From Darkness to Light. In explaining the wording in the title of the book, the authors wrote that the “absence and ignorance” of the “unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ” had kept the Nagas in “darkness” but with the coming of missionaries and the introduction of Christianity, the Nagas had “found the Light of life, hope, peace and love.”

Most of the histories of missionary work in the northeast written by Church historians, especially works of V. H. Sword and Robert G. Torbert, and early works of F. S. Downs, continued to work within the missionary paradigm of history and never felt the need to locate missionary work within the larger colonization process in the region. Similar was

69 Mary Mead Clark (1907), p. 168.
the case with much of the works of scholars and theologians from the converted tribes and nationalities in the northeast. They continued to portray their own history as one that was entrenched in ‘barbarism’ and ‘bondage’ but thanks to the ‘benevolent’ missionary, they had seen ‘light’. This is how a leading Naga theologian represented his own history:

“Once upon a time Nagas were known as head-hunters before Christianity came to our land. It was also true that Nagas were savages, wild, illiterate, half-clad, poor, sickly, and all that; and there were constant tribal feuds among them. Our ancestors were left to the mercy of nature. The Nagas also worshipped unknown gods and many spirits; they were narrow minded and superstitious. They were isolated from the rest of the world; others did not know them. This land was an unknown land, **Terra incognita.** It was proverbial among the Assamese kids that the whole of Naga Hills disappeared in the cloud where the people lived like monkeys in the branches and whoever penetrated close into their hills would lose their heads. That was our past. Now we are grateful to American missionaries that they brought to us the Good News of God which opened our eyes and liberated us from the bondage of darkness. Now our land is in progress with growing education; we breathe the air of civilization as good as with the rest of the world.”

The deep-rooted and hegemonic presence of this understanding of history is much evident from the fact that various sections of the Naga society whether they be pastors, teachers, politicians, agriculturists, women or students, all are structured by this missionary history. The quotation with which this paper began bears testimony to that. What is most interesting is to notice the presence of such an understanding of history, in a rather uncomplicated manner, coexisting alongside the efforts of Naga nationalists to write a Naga national history. The nationalist in the Naga sensibility has always tried to reclaim and write about the pre-colonial past. They have constantly stressed the ‘uniqueness’ of their culture and history, and the fact that they had “remained unconquered and un-administered by any foreign power” until the colonial period. Particularly nationalist leaders like Isak Swu have taken interest in compiling oral histories that were narrated by elders in each of the villages they visited and thereby contribute towards the making of a national history that was ‘unique’. In a pamphlet written sometime in the 1990s entitled *The Origin and the Migration of Nagas*, Isak Swu wrote about how important it is for a nation to “trace the origin of their own history properly” and “rescue it from oblivion”. However, alongside this quest to reclaim a unique Naga national history that talks vividly of the pre-colonial past, the Baptist Christian in the Naga nationalist sensibility has often maintained that “the message of the Gospel was the beginning of all things in Naga history”. In a pamphlet issued by the Government of People’s Republic of Nagaland on May 7, 1992, entitled *A Brief Political Account*, it is said:

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73 See Isak Chishi Swu, *The Origin and the Migration of the Nagas*, (Date and place of publication not mentioned)
74 Visier Sanyu (1990), p. 9
“The propagation of Christianity by the American Missionaries along with the imparting of education by opening missionary schools gave the greatest contribution to the rising of the Naga society. It was through them that the heathen Nagas learned of the existence of the Absolute Reality and the better way of living. Nagas could comprehend meaning life has and they won’t anymore part with it. They now felt blessed though endless hurdles remained. Nagas would be forever grateful to them.”

This strange coexistence of Naga nationalism and American Evangelical Christianity points towards what W. E. B. Du Bois once referred to as ‘double consciousness’. In reference to the dilemma a black man finds himself in a white America, Du Bois says:

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

From the formation of Naga Club in 1918, Nagas have been involved in a process of defining their political identity. In doing this, it has been essential for them to “rescue their history from oblivion” and reclaim a history that is unique. However, alongside this aspiration, a certain understanding of history that portrays their past as ‘barbaric’ and ‘savage’, that bestows the white man with the credit of ‘civilizing’ them, has come to exist in their consciousness, as a result of the hegemonic control of the white American missionary. Therefore, in other words, what we have is “two warring ideals in one dark body.”

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to explain the origins and making of a certain understanding of history that has come to exist in the consciousness of a large section of the Nagas following their encounter with American Baptist missionaries. The Nagas were made to feel at home with this understanding of history, coloured by the zeal of American missionaries to ‘redeem’ the ‘savage races’ from their ‘barbarism’ and lead them to ‘civilization’, through the hegemonic practices that the missionary undertook among them. One of the outcomes of this colonization process has been the silent presence of a ‘double consciousness’ whose contradictions are yet to be realized, sharpened and dealt with.

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75 Government of People’s Republic of Nagaland (GPRN), A Brief Political Account, Oking, May 7, 1992, p.1