

Decolonising 'Christian Mission' of the Tangkhul Nagas

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The history of Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas in Northeast India (NEI) is mostly recorded from the viewpoint of the colonials, specifically American Baptist missionaries and British administrators and/or ethnographers. When researching Christian mission, historians, clergy, and theologians frequently turn to colonial sources, such as colonial findings, reports, letters, articles (journals), and monographs, if not exclusively. They disregard regional factors, including indigenous occurrences, which influenced not only Tangkhul Naga Christians but also other populations. Given this reality, I propose decolonisation, or decolonial thinking, of Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas, which would re-look and give locals' roles and the effects of local events more importance than relying solely on colonial sources. To make the case for decolonisation is to reclaim the voices that have been marginalised (the micro voices) as a result of colonial hegemony during the colonial era and ongoing colonial captivity in the contemporary environment. This is meant to make the case for the necessity of recognising the tribal-indigenous historical details and occurrences that aided in the expansion and success of the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas. This is also a proposal for a colonial difference: highlight the voices that were silenced because of colonial dominance and captivity i.e., offer an alternative history of Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas from the perspective of a vision that was given to the Tangkhuls (a vision akin to a dream) and the revival movement of 1923.

Keywords: Northeast India, Tangkhul Nagas, Christian Mission, Western Mission, Voice of the Locals , Decolonial Thinking, Colonial Difference.

Introduction

Scholars and laypeople often focus on William Pettigrew (1869–1943), a Scottish–British Christian missionary who was the first Western missionary among the tribal–indigenous communities of Manipur, when discussing the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas (see Pettigrew 2006; Pettigrew Centenary Celebrations Committee 1996; Shimreiwung 2013; Shirik 2017; Kapai 2019). There are some instances where

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individuals discuss his first wife, Alice Goreham, and her contribution on the empowerment of tribal-indigenous women through education (see Khayi 1996; Kashung 2015). By and large, Pettigrew's contributions and accomplishments are prioritised over the locals' and local events' contributions that aided the expansion of the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas. They also prioritise Pettigrew's efforts while ignoring the work and contribution of other Western missionaries, like U.M. Fox and Earl E. Brock, as well as the work of locals.

While documenting the history of the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas, the role of the local people and the significance of local events, or what I would refer to as the “micro voices,”¹ are often overlooked. Unfortunately, even the contemporary writings of the native Tangkhul writers and academics show signs of this neglect. The Tangkhul church and society seem to have a deep fascination with the Western missionaries, which I would characterise as colonial captivity and puts them at a disadvantage in terms of Christian ministry and mission.²

The purpose of this article is to at least partially address the issue of the micro voices, the neglected voices. It will make the case for decolonising the Tangkhul Nagas' Christian mission by suggesting that the voice of the locals or micro voices be taken into consideration.³ These tasks acknowledge the tribal-indigenous historical details and occurrences that shed light on the circumstances and events that helped in the expansion and development of the Christian mission amongst the Tangkhul Nagas. It also makes a case for colonial difference: what the earlier writers overlooked is now given prominence paying attention to the writings and oral histories of the tribal-indigenous people, along with the missionaries' archive sources from the West.⁴ This required re-examining the story of the Tangkhul Nagas' conversion to Christianity from the perspective of a dream-like vision, which served as a foretelling of the arrival of Western missionaries in their oral tradition; and it also required acknowledging the influence of the revival movement (1923), which contributed to the growth of Christianity in Manipur.⁵ This is meant to imply that the Christian mission's ingenuity amongst Tangkhul Nagas is seen in the local events and occurrences. These events and occurrences make it clear if there was anything indigenous (i.e., non-colonial) about the Christian mission amongst Tangkhul Nagas.

Conceptual Framework

The idea of decolonisation, or decoloniality, has been employed as a political and intellectual endeavour over the years. This piece is in line with the latter endeavour, linking earlier work that examines marginal voices from a tribal-indigenous perspective. In terms of practicum, an effort is made to prioritise local events and occurrences i.e., the voices that have been ignored for decades, rather than giving preference to the activities and practices of the colonisers. It aims to answer the question of what it means to conduct decolonial research in conjunction with and from the perspective of the Tangkhul Nagas.

This article incorporates (and adapts) the idea of “decolonial thinking” from Gerald M. Boodoo's goal in terms of methodology (see Boodoo 2019; Boodoo 2015). He makes the case that “decolonial thinking” is essential and has the power to

“decolonize our theology” as well as open doors for practical and realistic epistemologies, engaging practices, and spiritualities (Boodoo 2019: 52). Although he examines missions in the setting of the Caribbean, his methodology may be applied to the Tangkhul context because they were also formerly colonised. Decolonisation, also known as decoloniality, is used in this context to refer to an epistemological project where an effort is made to study marginalise voices related to and from the Tangkhul Naga milieu.

Boodoo names three factors to take into account while discussing decolonial thinking in terms of mission. First, it is important to recognise that colonisation, or “modernity,” has brought about “a world system that for the first time in the history of the globe has united all (or almost all) areas of the world and swallowed them into a connected system” (Boodoo 2015: 68; see also Quijano 2008). This implies, in the case of the Tangkhul Nagas, that with the advent of the Western missionaries and British colonials in NEI, socioreligious ideals were planted in the locals’ thinking and practices, eroding the tribal-indigenous values. In the case of tribal communities in NEI, John Thomas suggests that “missionaries often resorted to using the name of certain powerful and influential entities from the traditional cosmology and reproduced them as the Christian God” (Thomas 2016: 32). Their views are being colonised by and with the colonial worldview, and this colonial input now affects how they perceive the world and behave. There is a way in which the tribal-indigenous populations are continuously being colonised even when the colonists have long since departed. After decades of being colonised, they sowed a deep sense of adoration for the colonial religion and customs, which today rule the tribal-indigenous way of life and affect all of their daily activities.

Secondly, Boodoo contends that “a ‘coloniality of power’ which favours and enshrines Euro-American thinking by forming itself” exists in all spheres of society (Boodoo 2015: 68). They use “global designs” to represent the local histories and expertise of British colonists and Western missionaries (Mignolo 2000: 17). In the framework of the current discussion, the tribal-indigenous actions, writing, and thinking are dominated by the Western missionary contribution to the Christian mission in the Tangkhul environment. They are the dominant voice, dictating the story. Meanwhile, the tribal-indigenous community’s contribution—the voice of the locals—is disregarded or improperly recognized. They are disparaged instead by using offensive language. It is clear that this overpowering influence pervades all aspects of life, not only the subject of Christian mission, and it still towers over them.

Third, a “new mode of thinking” that “seeks to develop knowledge formed from the colonial difference” is encouraged by decolonial thinking (Boodoo 2015: 68). Even while the Tangkhul setting exhibits a colonial inclination, they should not stay there, that is, they should not continue to live under the colonisers’ legacy. The voice of the locals’ concerns, which originate from neglected areas or occurrences, must be given priority instead. In an effort to historically reconstruct the story of Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas, this is done to defend the colonial difference, which refers to the voice of the locals that highlights the dream-like vision of the foretelling of the coming of Western missionaries and recognizes the impact of the

revival movement of 1923. The mission may now be regarded as “a movement taking place from the center to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized in society,” which can be a correction to the colonial trend (Keum 2013: 5). The goal here is to reconsider the Christian mission from the viewpoint of the locals’ voice, without fully undermining the role of Western missionaries.

The Western Mission

The American Baptist Missionary Union (hereafter, ABMU) entered the missionary effort in the kingdom of Manipur (now, state) in the year 1894.⁶ As a missionary with the Arthington Aborigines Mission, Pettigrew arrived in Calcutta in the year 1890 (Moore 1895: 4-5; Stanley 1988: 166-68, 170-71). He spent two years working with Bengalis before focusing on Manipur. He became interested in Manipur in 1891 because of an event known as the Khongjom War, also known as the Anglo-Manipur War (Pettigrew 1897: 325; see also Kapai 2019: 2). It gave Pettigrew a strong urge to go to Manipur. An attempt was made to learn Manipuri from the Silchar-based Manipuris as permission to enter Manipur was requested. No Western missionaries were permitted in Manipur prior to this time. With the assistance of A. Porteous, an active British political agent, Pettigrew was able to reach Manipur (Singh 1996: 7).

The ABMU saw this possibility to enter Manipur as the deciding factor in their decision to accept Pettigrew as a missionary, transitioning him from being an Arthington missionary to an ABMU (Moore 1895: 4-5). If they did not allow Pettigrew into their community, the ABMU committee was anxious that the door for missionary work in Manipur would never be opened. They stated the following in order to address their worries:

Should Mr. Pettigrew now leave Manipur it is unlikely that any missionary work can be taken up in the State during the minority of the present Raja. But unless he is immediately taken up by our Society he will be obliged to leave, and the country will be closed to the mission work for some years. On the other hand, if he is immediately taken up, there is a good prospect that work can be carried on continuously (Moore 1895: 4-5).

They agreed to allow Pettigrew to be ordained or commissioned as an ABMU missionary to Manipur in light of this urgency (and other worries).⁷ The ABMU committee recognised Pettigrew as a member of Sibsagar Baptist Church and ordained him as an ABMU missionary on December 22, 1895, viewing this opportunity as God’s providential conditions (Moore 1895: 4-5).

On May 7, 1894, Pettigrew landed in Manipur. He was allowed to open a school and hold classes there i.e., primarily working on educational projects. Between 1885 and 1895, he spent some time labouring in the valley before being asked to leave Imphal in order to avoid upsetting the Hindu Manipuris (Pettigrew 1897: 325). The British political agent, Major Patrick Maxwell, gave him permission to work in the Manipur hill areas (Moore 1895: 4-5). After surveying the hilly area, he made the decision to settle in the village of Ukhrul/Hunphun. He believed that Ukhrul village was strategically located among the Tangkhul Nagas (Pettigrew 1918).

In the year 1896, missionary work was initiated in Ukhrul (Pettigrew 1896: 526). The Tangkhuls' decision to accept Pettigrew into their community was primarily influenced by a dream-like vision, as it would be demonstrated in the latter portion of the paper. Like other missionary initiatives of the time, the start of a school in Ukhrul marked the beginning of missionary activities. But Pettigrew quickly ran into the problem of finding students who were eager to study. They were only able to recruit some students with the aid of Major Maxwell and Raihao. However, the majority of the students were not Manipuri speakers. To instruct the students, Pettigrew was compelled by this obstacle to learn the Ukhrul dialect. He stated that it was important to learn the local tongue in the following manner: "We feel it, therefore, important to learn their... language, and this has been part of the daily routine. By the end of the rains, it is hoped there will be sufficient knowledge to enable us to go and preach the gospel to the villages around" (Pettigrew 1896: 526). The whole of the Tangkhul Nagas would eventually speak this language as their common tongue. To teach the pupils in school and to proclaim the gospel in the local tongue, there was a pressing need to learn the language. According to J.S.M. Hooper, they believed that a vernacular approach to elementary education and evangelism was the way forward for those who were active in missionary activity during this time (Hooper 1963: 11). They believed that being able to converse with people in the same language would benefit their missionary work.

In addition to imparting Western education, schools were also employed to instil biblical truth. The way we observed the school in Ukhrul was as follows: "The literature they read are meant to instill Christian truth. Every day there is singing and prayer at the school. They assemble on the Lord's Day to sing and hear the gospel tale" (Pettigrew 1899: 53; see also Shimray 1996: 15). Twelve lads from the school in Ukhrul were baptised in 1901 after working among the Tangkhuls for roughly five years (Pettigrew 1996: v). Following this event, there was a greater desire in attending school and learning about the Christian faith, according to Y.K. Shimray (Shimray 1996: 15). Since that time, both the number of students and churchgoers gradually increased. Between 1906 and 1907, there were an additional 24 believers. In a year's time, there were a total of 70 believers in Ukhrul (Luikham 1948: 22).

There was "a gradual development in the number of believers and a general interest shown in the operations of the Mission," according to U.M. Fox's report in the ABFMS Report of 1913.⁸ However, he also observed that there was "no tremendous movement" in the Tangkhuls' conversion to Christianity or the growth of the church. In Manipur, there appeared to be a slow rise in the number of believers. Even after more than 20 years of widespread exposure to the Christian faith, the church membership only rose to 546 in 1920. The total number of believers among the seventeenth group of persons was this (Shimray 1996: 17). Frederick S. Downs also notes this kind of stagnancy, saying that "The Tangkhul church did not really begin to grow until after 1920." Then, it expanded quickly. There were 2,000 Tangkhul Christians by 1927 (Downs 1971: 164). Only after the 1923 revival movement did the population and way of life of the tribal-indigenous community significantly change. The dreamlike vision helped initiate this movement and contributed to the spread of

Christianity in Ukhurul.

The Dream-like Vision

Tangkhum Nagas is a communitarian society. The practice of oral tradition, in which information is passed down orally from one generation to the next, plays a significant role in such a community.⁹ A particular tale—or dream-like vision—concerning the arrival of a Western missionary has been passed down through generations among the Tangkhum community. In an effort to practice decolonial thinking, I will make the case that the historical account of the Tangkhum Nagas' conversion to Christianity has to be re-examined from what is known as the locals' perspective – in this case, the dream-like vision. The story in question is written down (re-narrated) in the way described below.¹⁰

The king of Ukhurul/Hunphun village was foretold of the arrival of a specific white man three hundred years (or so) before Pettigrew arrived at Ukhurul/Hunphun. Rashing, the Hunphun village's ruler, witnessed what appeared to be a dream-like vision. The relationship of the locals with the Western missionaries and the course of the Christian ministry among the Tangkhum Nagas would both be greatly impacted by this surreal vision.

Rashing noticed an exceptional figure approaching him one afternoon.¹¹ Prongo gives the following account of the individual and the incident:

The hair of this man was white grey like the colour of reeds flower, his eyes were like those of cats and the colour of his face was the colour of white buffalo. This man came straight to Rashing and told him that he was coming to give them light, and when the people receive the light, the leaves of the trees will speak and their day-to-day needs would be met from their pockets.¹²

The weird stranger uttered these words before turning and vanishing. Rashing was taken aback by this peculiar occurrence. He was unsure of how to interpret this almost dream-like vision. However, it was ingrained in his psyche firmly. In his lifetime, what he saw was not realised. But the dream-like vision was given to his son, Angayung, before he passed away. If the unusual man ever showed up in Hunphun village during his lifetime, he was urged to take care of him. He was also instructed to find out what the dream-like vision meant. The realisation of this dream-like vision was also denied to Angayung. He gave his kid, Yomnang, the dream-like vision much like his father had. Yomnang then relayed the surreal vision to Raihao. The vision that seemed like a dream came true during the reign of Raihao. It was delivered under the name William Pettigrew.

There was a major uproar in the village one afternoon.¹³ There had been a war cry yelled. The entire community ran in its direction brandishing spears and shields. They had gathered around a man when Raihao arrived. There, he encountered the white man who had been prophesied by his great-grandfather in a dream-like vision. Raihao intervened to prevent the villager's murder. He described to them the dreamlike vision that his great-grandfather saw. He was sure the weird man would explain the

significance and meaning of it. The action of Raihao spared Pettigrew's life. He was given land on the outside of the village, and he was allowed to dwell among them.¹⁴

Tangkhum Nagas has come to accept this dream-like vision as a prophecy from God over the course of several decades. They relate this surreal vision to how Isaiah told the Israelites that Jesus would be born. They acknowledged Pettigrew as "a messenger of God" who conveyed the gospel to the tribal-indigenous people in this story (Prongo 1996: 6). Now, along with acceptance of the so-called message of God, there is a strong admiration for the white colonisers, or *Shepshinao* in the local dialect. This means that what Pettigrew said, taught, and practised is accepted without question. The modern Tangkhum Nagas' mindset and behaviour are still influenced by this admiration for the Western missionary.

However, Pettigrew did not mention any attempt on his life by Hunphun villagers or Tangkhuls in the early reports about the Christian mission amongst them (Pettigrew 1897: 325-26; Pettigrew 1897: 526). He merely mentioned that the tribal peoples knew about the "European officials" who occasionally came to collect taxes (Pettigrew 1897: 326). Given this pattern, he believed that Hunphun residents would view his coming with distrust; he worked hard to win their trust. He noted in a subsequent report (1899) that the villagers of Ukhrul had welcomed him with "excitement" (Pettigrew 1899: 51). His report is stated in the following manner:

The missionary's arrival at Ukhrul caused no little excitement and, what was to be expected, a great deal of Suspensions... It is necessary to report this, for suspicion of the missionary's actions, has been rankling in the minds of this particular village for over two years, and it is only now that it can be said the tide has turned, and the fact of his coming amongst them for their good is being understood (Pettigrew 1899: 51).

The unfortunate event—where the villagers attempted to kill him—was never explicitly stated. His retrospective account of his twenty-year mission in Ukhrul does not include a report of such an incident either (Pettigrew 1996: i-xxiv). Why Pettigrew chose to remain silent about the incident is unknown. One can only assume that he did not have fond memories of this episode or that he did not view it as a significant development during his missionary endeavours among the tribal-indigenous people. While that might be the case, Pettigrew in his report praised Raihao, referring to him as the "Headman." He described Raihao in this way in his 1922 report: "The chief of Ukhrul at that time was a man above the ordinary, very tall and physically well made. He had been my teacher during the past year, and was willing to attend school with the boys..." (Pettigrew 196: v). Such sentiments of affection are rarely found in his reporting. Considering how Pettigrew rarely spoke well of the Tangkhuls, one can surmise that the headman did something good for the missionary. In addition, the closeness of their friendship is further evidenced by the way Raihao arrived at the Ukhrul school that Pettigrew founded. Raihao took the initiative to bring 20 more pupils when the villagers refused to go to school.¹⁵ He persuaded the residents to join the school.

Over time, the phrase “the light” from the dream-like vision came to mean education, the phrase “leaves that speak” meant writings on paper, and the idea of satisfying “day-to-day requirements” through the pockets meant that individuals carried cash to meet their wants (Prongo 1996: 6). Because of this comprehension, Pettigrew was seen as “a real messenger of God” (Prongo 1996: 6). If we look more closely at the description of the dream-like vision, we can see that the fulfilment theory in question shares a lot in common with the spirituality of the Tangkhuls during the pre-colonial era—and to some extent, with the setting of today. The native Tangkhuls do not distinguish between the secular and sacred realms (see Thumra 2003: 54, 74). The sacred and the secular are intertwined in their view. The current world is viewed as continuing into the following. According to their traditional beliefs, God can speak to those who are physically present in this world by means of dreams or, in this case, visions that resemble dreams. Their traditional beliefs and practices were influenced in part by their belief in dreams (and in omens); they also thought that dreams might predict the future (see Mataisang 2019: 105-110). The tribal-indigenous beliefs and customs, however, would be scorned as superstitious by the Western missionaries.

This disregard of indigenous beliefs is greatly influenced by the missionary mindset of the Western missionaries, who believed that their role as missionaries and theologians was to spread the gospel and illuminate the tribal-indigenous population, which they claimed was in darkness, with the truth of the Bible. They approached the indigenous culture with a supracultural perspective, theologising with the assumption that the truth contained in the Bible is universal and that tribal-indigenous culture had to be confronted.¹⁶ It was assumed that the Tangkhul Nagas needed to hear the truth that the person and the work of Jesus Christ offers. Although this haste was well-intentioned, it nevertheless carried negative connotations about the tribal-indigenous group by using terms like ignorant, superstitious, primitive, pagan, and worshipers of malevolent spirits, among others (Pettigrew 1996: i-xxiv). Additionally, it was believed that the tribe or traditional religion needed to be transformed into “a higher religion or culture” because it was considered to be superstitious or animistic (Horam 1996: 47).

The Revival Movement

In its early years of Christianity in Manipur, the Christian faith and its practices were predominately practised in and around Ukhrul. Geographically speaking, the church was in the Ukhrul village.¹⁷ Through the support of the mother church, the nearby smaller churches could continue to function. They might not have survived on their own. Fox claims that “a small number of other villages are required to keep in touch with this church and maintain an interest therein” (Fox 1913: 60). This is due to the fact that in the early years of Christianity in Manipur, conversion to the Christian faith was often accompanied by intense pressure from the family, society, or village. Furthermore, new converts had a hard time adjusting to their newfound faith and the alien way of life that came with Christianity. For instance, when Pettigrew attempted to reform Christian beliefs by forbidding churchgoers from attending cultural events and drinking rice beer between 1906 and 1907, the church’s membership dropped

from 70 to 7 (Luikham 1948: 23). As one might expect, it was challenging for the new believers to separate themselves from their established culture and manner of life (rice beer).

The non-believers, or those who still adhere to Tangkhul traditional religion, persecuted the believers in addition to the difficulties that came with being a minority and adjusting to a new faith. The impulse to return to their old religion was felt by the new converts. The tribal religion's adherents made numerous attempts—some of which were successful and others unsuccessful—to return them to their former lives. However, Luikham claims that some believers did not wish to return to the lifestyle of drinking rice beer and eating sacrificed meat (Luikham 1948: 35).

The new Christians prayed to God for assistance during this hardship. They saw the 1923 revival movement in the Tangkhul-populated districts as a fulfilment of their prayers (Luikham 1948: 36). Among the Tangkhul Nagas, there appears to be considerable misunderstanding regarding the timing of the revival effort. The word “revival” is used frequently, although it has several diverse connotations that contribute to the confusion. Pettigrew mentioned a “revival” of the Tangkhul Nagas in 1921. He mentions that “a revival began among the Tangkhul Nagas, led by two young men one the Headmaster of the school at Ukhrol, Miksha Shimrei, and the other by the pastor of the church, Thisan [Luikham]” (Pettigrew 2006: 9). This narrative is supported by Y.K. Shimray's writing, who also spoke of a similar resurgence in May 1921 (Shimray 1996: 17). Here, there is no implication of a Pentecostal or charismatic-like movement. Instead, it appears that Pettigrew is discussing the development of the church, its self-sustaining course, and the enlargement of church structures. Additionally, Shimray appears to have taken material regarding the rebirth of 1921 from Pettigrew, according to a deeper examination of his writings.¹⁸ This growth or “revival” as Pettigrew suggests, can be stated in the following:

There were 295 baptisms that year, and 200 were reported on the waiting list. In 1923, the baptisms were 1018. By 1925, all the churches and village schools had become self-supporting Church pastors and teachers were paid by church and Association funds. All church buildings were erected by the voluntary labor and expense of the Christian communities (Pettigrew 2006: 9-10).

Luikham, one of the early believers and pupils of Pettigrew, seems to be referring to some form of awakening in his writings when he uses the term “revival” (Luikham 1948: 34). When alluding to the 1921 resurgence, he uses the term “thuikhamathuk,” which can be translated as awakening (Shimray 1996: 17). After this alleged awakening, the number of believers rose. As Pettigrew also noted, this rise in the number of believers prompted persecution in 1922 from the unbelievers (Luikham 1948: 34). According to Luikham, the non-believers' persecution provided them with a chance to put their faith in Christ to the test (Luikham 1948: 34). They had to split ways since they endured a lot of suffering at the hands of unbelievers. The new believers relocated from their village and established outside of it with the aid of Christian missionaries (Luikham 1948: 35).

The 1923 revival movement was seen as a solution to their suffering by the new Christians who were struggling to deal with persecution. The activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers—and its consequences—are linked to the 1923 revival. The Northeast Indian churches, local writers, and Christian writers-scholars support the 1923 revival movement (see Luikham 1948: 36-37; Downs 1971: 61-62; Longvah 1990: 15-20; Centenary Planning Committee 2002; Ruivah 2009). As previously mentioned, the Tangkhul-inhabited areas did not experience a significant Christian movement during the first two decades of Christianity (Fox 1913: 59). However, the 1923 revival movement brought about exponential increase in both the number of churches and believers.

Regarding the movement's beginnings, there is general agreement. Local and foreign writers concur that the Lushai/Mizo Hills are where the movement began (Downs 1971; Longvah 1990; Ruivah 2009). On the other hand, there are various differences of opinion on the Manipur revival movement's origin. Longvah argues that the renaissance of 1923 began in a Kuki village without naming the village (Longvah 1990: 15). However, according to Downs, the revival was "the association gathering at the Tongkoi church" (Downs 1971: 161; see also Longvah 1990: 15). Additionally, there are records of a party of Tangkhul villagers (from Somdal village) that visited Makokching, a village in Senapati village, and attended the revival gathering (Ruivah 2009: 19-20; Ruivanao 2008: 50).

In the revival meeting, fifteen of them—thirteen from Somdal village and two from Hunphun village—witnessed the work of the Spirit. According to this narrative, the Makokching revival movement was started by "a 15-year-old kid who came from the Lushai Hills (the current state Mizoram) after receiving a word from the Holy Spirit to go and preach there. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand, was his message (Ruivanao 2008: 50). Attending this revival movement had a profound effect on people's lives throughout Manipur, not just in Somdal and Hunphun Village. The fifteen-year-old boy also came with the message that the good news should be spread to "[Somdal] village in the west" and Tongkoi church in the east" where one village would spread the gospel in the hills and the other in the valley (Ruivanao 2008: 50). The expansion of Christianity in Manipur was greatly aided by this revival movement. The Christians had a Pentecostal event similar to that described in the book of Acts when the Spirit descended upon them. They confessed their sins and were overwhelmed with joy. Some of them danced, while others prophesied as the Spirit touched them (Ruivah 2009: 20-21; Ruivanao 2008: 51). After leaving the revival meeting, they spread the gospel throughout the valley and hillside regions. As a result, the number of new believers grew rapidly in the state of Manipur.

An upsurge in "evangelistic activity" and a spirit of stirring up the populace and the church were characteristics of this revival movement (Downs 1971: 161). The fundamental beliefs of this revival movement can be grouped into the following categories: The community experienced an outpouring of the Mangla Kathara, or Holy Spirit, similar to the one described in Acts 2:1-4; when the Spirit descended upon them, they confessed their sins and any wrongdoings they may have committed against others; the number of visions and prophecies increased; and the number of

people who want to serve the Lord increased (Ruivah 2009: 19-20).

Although the Western missionaries recognised the virtues of the revival movement, they were critical of its protracted gathering. Down expresses the following concern in the movement's latter stages:

As the revival progressed, however, it began to take a more ecstatic, Pentecostal form which tended to weaken the churches and divert their attention from the essential business of Christianity. The meetings, which were growing longer and longer to the point where people were doing nothing else, became more and more emotional. Strange teachings began to be given based upon dreams and visions. Many Christians left everything and went into the jungles to prepare themselves for the Second Coming, which they believed to be imminent (Downs 1971: 162).

The revival movement was not warmly received by the Western missionaries, despite the fact that they recognised its significance. This opinion is also held by some contemporary townspeople and church leaders where the revival movement began. They spiritualise the historical events and contend that the protracted revival movement caused apathy and a disregard for daily matters, or the affairs of the world. It got to the point where some Western missionaries even started criticising the revival movement's results. In 1926, Crozier "denounced the Manipur Revival as the 'spasm of 1923' in which, he concluded, the Devil had caused many mock imitations of the work of the Holy Spirit" (Downs 1971: 162). Pettigrew concurred with this viewpoint. The criticism of the revival movement is based on the idea that it divided the churches and corrupted how they understood Christianity (Downs 1971: 162).

Here, I would contend that the Western missionaries' criticism or denunciation of the revival movement was not limited to this. The revival movement gave Christianity an indigenous perspective. Such a charismatic experience of the Christian was unlike Baptist or Anglican denomination procedures; it was unlike the faith or denominational practices they brought or preached. The colonists lost control of the community or churches they first evangelised as a result of the revival movement. Given that some denominations would not permit Western missionaries to enter their village, this is a likely scenario (Downs 1971: 162). In other words, the dismissal of the revival movement has a lot to do with the decline in influence over the churches and indigenous people. It was not because it caused the new believers' lives to undergo substantial adjustments.

The 1923 revival movement had a tremendous impact on the destiny of the Tangkhul churches, which one cannot – or should not – ignore. It not only sparked evangelical zeal but also provided guidance for the church's future development (Luikham 1948: 37). They were prepared to deal with the difficulties of being persecuted and expelled from their village environment as a minority group. After the revival movement, for instance, the church and school in Ukhru served as a snowball to draw people to and propagate the Christian faith. It evolved as the centre of gaining and learning about the Christian faith.

The number of new believers quickly rose as M.E. School students returned to the nearby communities and shared their newly discovered beliefs. The then-Sub

Divisional Office of Ukhrul, L.L. Peters was troubled by this circumstance. The preaching of the Christian faith, the drafting of letters of faith, and open evangelical effort were all forbidden by orders.¹⁹ According to Luikham, they even attempted to imprison Christian leaders and punish them in the community (Luikham 1948: 35). Despite the difficulties that the new converts encountered, a new excitement for education was developed, coupled with a passion to preach, and disseminate the good news (Luikham 1948: 37). Many people, including villages, wanted to educate themselves and equip themselves. They also started their own church and started constructing schools in several villages. Interestingly, they accomplished this without necessarily enlisting the aid of the missionaries from the West.²⁰

The establishment of religious associations is another important outcome of such indigenous efforts. They established various religious organisations in 1926 to facilitate the practical application of abilities and resources (Luikham 1948: 38). These organisations would join together to plan spiritual conventions every three years. Pettigrew discussed how native churches were independent and self-sufficient after 1925, but he did not give the locals credit (Pettigrew 2006: 84). He took note of the establishment of church associations and the 1928 Manipur Baptist Association first congress (Pettigrew 2006: 85). The second and third conventions, which took place in 1931 and 1934, respectively, came after this. With “the Maharaja of Manipur and his Councillors’ approval,” they held the latter convention in Imphal (Pettigrew 2006: 86). In the state of Manipur at this period, there were 10, 004 believers (Luikham 1948: 40). The effects of the revival movement and its aftereffects point to growth in the number of believers and their networking in the state of Manipur. Even if it is impossible to ignore the ongoing effect of Western missionaries, the contribution of local events is noteworthy.

The Way Forward

Readers of the Christian mission would not be critical of colonial input or their strategy if they simply read the findings, letters, documents, or writings of the colonists. It may be found that they over glorify their sacrifice, success, or service when recording their legacy. Shirik, for instance, praises Pettigrew for being “a man totally dedicated to God and his mission, wholly given to preparation and hard labour, and wholly given to the church and the world” while describing how Pettigrew’s missionary assignment was considered successful (Shirk 2017: 39). But like him, many fails to bring out the cultural and religious encroachment brought forth by the colonists’ arrival. His contribution is uncritically celebrated – and refer to themselves using derogatory words, such as heathen, ignorant, etc. (Shimrany 1996: 12). Such talk about themselves and of the colonists is evident not just in written materials but also in the beliefs and behaviours of the faith community in the contemporary setting. The colonials sowed the idea that what is colonial is by definition good and what is tribal or indigenous is dubious, and this idea has now become a part of the socioreligious reality of the Tangkhul society. The power over and against those who are “outside” colonialism and unaware of its damaging effects rests with those who are “inside” or heavily influenced by it (Boodoo 2019: 52). Therefore, they are

oblivious to the fact that the Christian mission of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (in NEI) coincided with colonial expansion (Bosch 1991: 227). As Vashum notes, “the general assumption was that colonial expansion to the non-Christian world was believed to be God’s providence; it was regarded as opportunities for propagating the Gospel to the ‘heathen’ world” (Vashum 2007: 1). This was the precise mindset of ABMU when they chose to send Pettigrew to Manipur as their missionary.

Once the idea of coloniality’s superiority has been ingrained in social structures, institutional frameworks, and epistemic input, alternative tribal-indigenous societies, cultures, or beliefs are disparaged. Tribal-indigenous values are absorbed by colonial values. Now, anything they profess to understand—including the mission task or goal—is assumed by everyone else to be true. What the colonials taught and practised in the universal truth. Walter Mignolo argues that “Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of subalternity. From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs” (Mignolo 2000: 17). As a result, neither the existence of the dream-like vision nor its full recognition in the Tangkhul inhabited areas were ever stated in any colonial document. While the existence of a revival movement in 1923 is a historical truth, its influence was not fully acknowledged. If not, it would imply that locals are carrying out the mission’s task or aim, which would acknowledge tribal-indigenous involvement and contribution and, in theory, go against colonial ideas. This failing to recognise is also evident in other disciplines and requires examination across other fields. For instance, in the field of Bible translation, locals’ contributions are never acknowledged, despite the fact that Sunday school students provided a significant amount of assistance (Ragui 2022: 14).

Tangkhul historians, clergymen, and theologians must practise decolonial thought in light of this reality. In this essay, I have taken a fresh look at the history of Christian mission from the standpoint of the 1923 revival movement and the dream-like vision. These voices, known as the micro voice, are hardly captured in written records because they are overpowered by colonial input-thinking. However, there is a pressing need for the local readers to be critical of this reality: they must be aware of the colonists’ continued sway over the tribal-indigenous population and their captivity. In terms of application, it is necessary to oppose “global and totalitarian” schemes made in the “name of universality” (Boodoo 2019: 53).

After that, take part in bringing local epistemologies that colonial thought had suppressed or overlooked. Relevant to this issue, it might entail acknowledging the role played by locals and regional events in the development of the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas. Or other areas, such as theology, religion, education, etc., it would entail adopting a decolonising mindset that emphasises local knowledge and customs that improve society. Perhaps, what can be further explored and decolonised in the areas of education. The demand for education and learning surged following the revival movement. To the established schools run by the Western missionaries, they drew a sizable population. Western and contemporary education were conceived to be urgently needed. Due to this urgency, a large number of residents completed their higher education as well as their secondary education. While that

may be the case, the Tangkhul Nagas' educational system continues to be oriented toward the West. The Western educational system exudes a sense of confinement. Indigenous education, which took place mostly in longshim or longhouses (dormitory), was disregarded. Longshim was crucial in influencing how men and women lived in the pre-colonial era (Horam 1977; see also Shimrei 2015). According to M. Horam, the longshim is characterised by a "relaxation, leisure, and languid ease" environment where "...play, singing, and dancing are a common characteristic of the longshim" (Horam 1977: 69). However, it also achieves a good mix between learning and enjoyment. Additionally, longshim is a location where people can develop life skills, preparing them for "all the chores and obligations of life" (Horam 1977: 69). The village elders instruct them in both life's fundamentals and the finer points. While some aspects of longshim continue to exist, the tribal-indigenous community's customs are being forgotten or fast disappearing. Because of the dominance of the colonial education system, such indigenous educational methods are seen by many as no longer effective in the current environment. As a result, the majority of our folklore, songs, dances, etc., are lost or ignored. The Tangkhul traditional customs and ideals must be revived. Again, this should be done critically, keeping in mind that not all cultural practices and ideals are positive; some of the traditional heritage might be harmful and repressive.

Conclusion

This essay made the case for decolonising the Tangkhul Nagas' understanding of the Christian missionary history. It made the case that the micro voice or the voice of the locals must be taken into account. More specifically, it argued for colonial difference by reconsidering the story of the Christian mission among the Tangkhul Nagas from the perspective of a dream-like vision that foretold the arrival of Western missionaries in the Tangkhul inhabited areas; and by acknowledging the revival movement of 1923, which led to an increase or people movement in the Christian population among the Tangkhuls. Endorsing such decolonial thinking carries with it more than one meaning. The story of the Christian ministry among the Tangkhul Nagas would have taken a different turn if it were not for the dreamlike vision. Without the revival movement, we might not have seen the Christian faith become a people's movement in the early twentieth century.

Although there is a clear colonial influence, this article demonstrated that these local occurrences continued to have an impact both in the early twentieth century and in the current environment. It is not just our responsibility to maintain these influences, but also to critique colonial and indigenous practices. Identifying the colonial difference is the main job. To take this task further, it may also entail re-examining how mission and theology are carried out, how the Bible is translated and interpreted, and other aspects of the mission narrative among Tangkhul Nagas.

Endnotes

¹ As opposed to macro voice, which refers to a single colonial voice that permeates and dominates all aspects of tribal-indigenous life, micro voice in this study refers to the local events and occurrences that greatly contributed to the growth of Christian

mission.

² This is a product of the Northeast Indian tribal community's long period of colonial suppression (Vashum 2007: 1-22).

³ In another setting, I have argued for a decolonial interpretation of the Tangkhul Nagas' mission that takes into account the indigenous experience of various contexts (Ragui, 2021).

⁴ The utilisation of archival documents (such as letters, reports, etc.) from Western missionaries has become the predominant method for writing about the history and methods of Christian mission among Tangkhul Nagas. As a result, local-indigenous sources have been generally disregarded by historians and Christian scholars.

⁵ This approach of documenting Christian history aims to be analytically descriptive but not necessarily theoretical. And it takes the tribal-indigenous experience – in this case, their role and events – very seriously.

⁶ The Triennial Conference in Sibsagar in December 1895 and the Executive Committee in Boston in January 1896 both made the decision. (Pettigrew 1899: 50).

⁷ The Political Agent in Manipur was on good terms with Pettigrew; Pettigrew has a good working knowledge of Bengali and Manipuri; he was found satisfactory in terms of Christian character and fitness, and; his call to Christian mission is clear and convincing (Moore 1895: 4-5).

⁸ During Pettigrew's furlough, U.M. Fox and Nellie F. Fox came to help the mission work in Ukhrul in the year 1911 (Fox 1913: 60; see also Luikham 1948: 26).

⁹ For discussion on the relevance of oral tradition in the Tangkhul community, see Kashung 2017: 112-116.

¹⁰ This story was shared with me as a child in a variety of locations and at various times. The oral tradition of the Tangkhul people includes this surreal vision. For our purposes and clarity, I have re-narrated this story from the work of K. Prongo (Prongo 1996: 5-6).

¹¹ Rashing allegedly drank some rice beer before he reportedly had the dream-like vision. Some astute readers may be tempted to disregard such potential visions or assert foretelling of events due to the likely intoxicating influence. However, it is discovered that Pettigrew, the townspeople, and the modern Tangkhul Nagas are all still influenced by the surreal vision.

¹² Do not misinterpret how these terms are used. According to the time's known references, people used these expressions. Additionally, it confirms that Raihao and his people had an odd experience as a result of this occurrence (Prongo 1996: 5).

¹³ This event likely happened in the year 1895 when Pettigrew toured the Tangkhul inhabited areas (Downs 1971: 78).

¹⁴ This plot of land where Pettigrew and his family resided is called a mission compound. The church associated with the missionary is called Phungyo Baptist Church.

¹⁵ Some locals are of the view that Raihao helped Pettigrew survey Tangkhul villages (i.e., Shirui, Langdang, and Khangkhui). This was possible as the headman also knew how to communicate in the Meitei language (Manipuri) (Shaiza, 2017); Luikham 1948: 18).

¹⁶ A good example of such an approach to tribal-indigenous culture is captured in the following article: Pettigrew 1909: 37-46.

¹⁷ Ukhrul continued to be the ABMU's sub-station even after the mission was moved to Kangpokpi in 1919 (Down 1971: 164).

¹⁸ The wording and details of the revival seem to be exactly the same as in Pettigrew. It is a copy of Pettigrew's reports.

¹⁹ Order no. 123, Uk/P/2/12/1924; Order no. 14, Uk/P/14/11/1924; Order no. 106, Uk/P/7/11/24. Cited in R. Luikham 2002.

²⁰ The revival movement can also be viewed as a turning point in the indigenous church and society's transition to self-sustainability (Luikham 1948: 37).

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