CHAPTER III

RELATIONS BETWEEN MISSIONS AND GOVERNMENTS 1919-1947
CHAPTER III

RELATIONS BETWEEN MISSIONS AND GOVERNMENT, 1919-1947

There was rivalry as well as friendly cooperation between the different missionary societies. The mission rivalry or conflict may be of two kinds - intra-mission rivalry and inter-mission rivalry. While intra-mission rivalry was generated in most cases by personal differences or personality clash within the same group or organisation, the inter-mission rivalry was mainly, if not wholly, due to denominational differences. But the rivalry and competition between Protestant Missions and the Roman Catholics was more in the nature of inter-faith or ecclesiastical difference rather than denominational.

3.1 Intra-Mission Rivalry (Conflict within the NEIGM in Manipur)

The intra-mission rivalry was most common in the NEIGM. One of the conditions by which Churachand Singh, the maharaja of Manipur, allowed the NEIGM to function in Manipur was that it should undertake to control its workers and prevent them from any possible clash with the workers of the American Baptist Mission.¹ Failing which, the permission was liable to be revoked immediately. But this time, the conflict came from within.

¹ Foreign and Political Department, File No. 283-F (1929), p.2.
No sooner had Watkin Roberts, who founded the mission and acted as its field director at Calcutta with P.J. Testro as field treasurer, formed the British Advisory Council in London and the branch American Council at Philadelphia, than the NEIGM was engulfed with internal crisis. According to Mr R. Wright Hay, the first Chairman of the British Council, the First Secretary left the mission consequent upon his procedural irregularities and following this, he himself and some executive members also resigned as more irregularities crept in. Apparently the genesis of the conflict between Roberts and his home board seemed to be over financial misappropriation. The formation of the two councils with paid officials definitely increased the expenditure of the mission and was it because of this the workers on the field could not get their pay for several months? The home board claimed that they did send the fund regularly. As a first step to tide over

2 After Mr R. Wright Hay’s resignation, Mr. W.G. Walters was the Chairman; J.C. Williams, Home Director (England and USA) of British Council and Mr H.H. Colenan was the General Secretary of the American Council.

3 Foreign and Political Department, Political Branch, File No.134-P(S)/1930.

this financial problem, Roberts suggested the reduction of the expenditure of the home establishment both in London and Philadelphia.

When mutual suspicion was mounting up, Roberts was accused of (1) running a profitable trade business for his own profit in collaboration with the so-called "Pine and Company" (in fact, Roberts encouraged the national workers to earn extra money income through cane and bamboo works by helping them sell these products in Silchar and Calcutta); (2) mismanagement of funds; (3) wrong report of the number of church membership; and (4) running of a field from such a far distance like Calcutta. Failing to see eye to eye, the home board then deputed J.C. William, Home Director, J.E. Turnley and H.H. Coleman to the mission field and the team arrived at Lakhipur (Cachar district, Assam) in January 1929. Most surprisingly, what had begun as the misunderstanding between the home board and the field mission later on

5 Ibid., p.9.
8 D. Kuolngul, op.cit., p.53.
turned out to be a personal vindication between Coleman and Roberts. It appeared that there was a conspiratorial move which was masterminded by Coleman even before the team left for India. Roberts was forced to resign and Coleman was made the General Superintendent of the NEIGM.  

In his letter to H.K. Dohmuna, 7 June 1929, Coleman disclosed that he was made the General Superintendent of the Mission by the London Council. R. Wright Hay also affirmed that by the time the team was being deputed, Coleman had already several 'resolutions' with him.  

According to T.W. Tait, Philadelphia, the dismissal of Roberts was caused by a body of men who were guilty of spending for several years not less than 90 per cent of their receipts on home administration against which Roberts had protested.  

The conflict assumed an ugly turn when Coleman took it up to the government of Assam and the national Christians were scapegoats for no fault of theirs. In his interview with the Governor of Assam, Coleman claimed that he was there to eradicate the abuses at present

---

10 Foreign and Political Department, Political Branch (1930).  
11 T.W. Tait's letter to the NEIGM, 5 January 1931, as reproduced by D. Ruolngul, *op.cit.*, p.76.
existing in the NLIGM and to place the management of the mission on sound basis by the employment of a medical missionary as agreed to by the maharaja of Manipur.12 Coleman's main motive was to discredit Roberts with the help of government officials completely. He, therefore, made a strong representation to the governor that his mission work could not progress only because of what he called Roberts' 'machinations' exercised through H.K. Dohnuna (field secretary and Roberts' staunch supporter) and some national workers in Cachar district and in the border of Manipur.

Coleman did not stop here. He made a tactical move and his main strategy was to win over Dohnuna or to deport him outside Manipur. Upon Dohnuna's refusal to join his group, Coleman then threatened that no other mission workers than his would be allowed to operate in Manipur any longer.13 Shrewed as he was, he could successfully draw the whole state machinery to his own advantage. G.D. Walker, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar immediately served a notice to Dohnuna that the

12 Foreign and Political Department, Political Branch (1930).

13 G.D. Walker, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar to H.K. Dohnuna, Lakhipur, 10 October, 1929, p.3.
latter should immediately vacate the land held in the name of the NEIGM and to make over to the mission the property including papers which belonged to it.\textsuperscript{14} Following this, J.C. Higgins, the political agent of Manipur also served ultimatum to Dohnuna and his son Thenglura, a medical practitioner that since that had been dismissed by the NEIGM, they were not allowed to enter the state of Manipur without prior permission from him.\textsuperscript{15} The order created so havoc in the minds of the native workers that a woman who had just given birth was to be physically carried away whilst still unable to walk.\textsuperscript{16}

The political agent of Manipur as well as the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar thus acted only on the \emph{ex parte} evidence of Coleman and his associates in Manipur. The argument by which the government officials both in Manipur and Cachar tried to justify their action was that the factionalization of the native people into two opposing camps was likely to affect the law and order situation of the state.

\begin{itemize}
\item[14] Ibid., p.3.
\item[16] G.D. Walker, \textit{Deputy Commissioner to Dohnuna}, 12th October 1929, p.5.
\end{itemize}
Prior to his departure for London, Roberts threatened to publish the whole issue and this made the officials in Manipur panicky. When interviewed by the Governor of Assam, Roberts put forward the following demands: (1) that the officials involved in letting loose a 'reign of terror' on innocent people be severely dealt with, (2) that the evicted Christians be reinstated in their villages; and (3) that compensation be given to the Christians for the severe losses which they had suffered. Because of the growing cooperation between Coleman and the administration, Roberts, however, felt that he had none to adequately represent his case. It was under these frustrating circumstances that he left for England in November 1929 to dispute his dismissal and to contest the control over the mission with the home council. What Roberts did first on arrival was the dissolution of the home council and then formed a new council with those members who had supported him. In this new council, R.W. Hay was renominated as Chairman and on the mission field, Dohmuna was appointed as the field secretary. In order to regain the ownership of the mission, Roberts

17 W.G. Roberts' article, "Persecution of Native Christians in India by British Officials".

18 R.W. Hay to Under Secretary, Pal and Judicial Department, India Office, London, 3 February 1930.
contemplated to resort to legal battles and actually sought the assistance of John Leech, a retired British judge in London. Meanwhile, R.W. Hay also memorandumed the India office suggesting that its officers both in Assam and Manipur should immediately be instructed to refrain themselves from acting further upon the _ex parte_ allegations of Coleman pending a final settlement in London and the workers whose movements were now being restricted should also be allowed their normal freedom of action.

The Christian leaders in America too became increasingly concerned because the legal battle within the same mission society would be detrimental to the healthy growth of foreign mission. Dr Thomas T. Tait, a man of reputation in Christian alliance in Philadelphia thus came out with a suggestion that some impartial and influential group of Christian men should be called together to deal with this most distressing situation. What Tait had suggested was the constitution of investigative committee, the chairman of which should be a Christian

---

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 T.W. Tait's letter to the Council of NEIGM, USA, dated January 5, 1931 as cited by Dr Roohgul, _op.cit._, p. 76.
attorney, with experience in dealing with documentary evidence without further delay. While Roberts readily agreed to be bound by the findings of the proposed committee, Coleman remained adamant and forcibly pushed the issue to the courts. Desirous of founding a new mission instead of squandering mission money in legal battles, Roberts refused to make any statement before the court and this was taken to mean that Coleman was the undisputed owner of the NEIGM.22

This was not the end. When Roberts started a new mission called Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, he had little or no prospect to push the new mission to Manipur. One problem was that by the time Roberts got the NEIGM registered with the government of Manipur, he was perhaps told that no other mission organisation be allowed to operate in Manipur. Therefore, tension continued to exist. The Governor of Assam went to the extent of suggesting the derecognition of Roberts as a missionary in India and the refusal of a passport to him after a proper enquiry as the government deemed it necessary. The basis of the Governor's suggestion was that Roberts had been repudiated by both the American and English council of the mission.23

22 D. Ruolngul, op.cit., p.78.
23 Governor of Assam to Charles Wetson, Political Secretary to the Government of India (F. & Pol. Department), Shillong, 2 March 1930, p.11.
Endorsing the governor's view, Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, immediately brought the matter before the Secretary of State for India for restriction of Roberts' return to Manipur. The reaction of Samuel Hoare, the Secretary of State for India was vehement. In his reply on 24 May 1930, he emphatically argued that there was no question of withdrawing recognition as a missionary from any individual British subject. He further added that procedures for obtaining guarantees as to bona fides of individual missionaries through general conference of missionary societies applied only to aliens. The more overriding factor was, however, that such extreme step would be certain to be hotly attacked in Parliament.

While reviewing the issue, the Governor of Assam and the political agent came to the same conclusion again and reiterated their fear that Roberts would, if allowed to return again, certainly encourage faction feeling with the inevitable result that the maharaja of Manipur would ask for the withdrawal of the concession for all missionary enterprise in the hill areas of the state. The Governor further added that this step was necessary to prevent 'serious trouble' in Manipur and hence

---

24 Samuel Hoare to Lord Irwin (Foreign and Political Department), Telegram R.No. 1714, dated 24th May 1930.

25 Ibid.
justifiable. The officials were aware of the fact that the peaceful missionary movement had beneficial influences in the shape of education and medical relief. In view of the limited financial resources of the Manipur state durbar, the local officials thought it foolish to reject the offer of a reliable missionary organisation which offered these benefits free to the backward hill tribes in the southwest corner of Manipur. With the advancement of modern education and medical facilities, according to the political agent, the people became as law-abiding as their neighbours, the Lushais in the adjoining British districts. Certainly, the Kuki rebellion of scarcely ten years ago was still fresh in their minds and they incurred heavy expenditure with the Kuki punitive measure. Thus, on the whole, the government was all for the missionary movement in the hill areas but was at the same time sensitive to such missionary conflicts which could affect the stability of their rule over the hill territory. It is from this perspective that the government looked at the whole conflict and because of the persistent efforts

26 W.A. Cosgrave, Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, Shillong to the Political Secretary to the Government of India, 4 June 1940 (Foreign and Political Department).

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.
of Coleman through his medical missionary, Dr. G.G. Crozier, Roberts was refused a passport.29

Dr Crozier was quick to join the fray. On the suggestion of Coleman, he thus wrote to his brother in New York to immediately file a case against Roberts alleging that since Roberts was not an American citizen, his fund-raising for the IBPM was 'illegal'.30 Edward Curai, Commissioner of Immigration, New York District had to serve a notice to Roberts that his application for a further extension of stay in USA was denied adding that "this decision also applies to your wife Gladys and your two children Ruth May and Paul Danby".31

Meanwhile, Roberts' supporters on the field in Manipur were facing no less opposition from the state officials and Mr McCall was out at border meeting with the Lushai hills, at Tipaimukh on Higgins' instruction 'to round up as many as these men as he can. I fear we have not finished with Mr Roberts'.32

29 D. Ruolngul, op.cit., p.78.
30 Ibid., p.79.
31 Roberts later on set up his home office at Toronto, Canada from where he looked after his mission (IBPM).
32 J.C. Higgins to W.H. Cosgrave, Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, 23 May 1930 (Foreign and Political Department).
The maharaja of Manipur also instructed his durbar members to take drastic actions against the IBPM workers who had then organised themselves as an independent church. On the recommendation of the President of the durbar, Higgins, the political agent, passed an official order on 22 November 1930 which debarred the Independent Church (IC) workers from organising any sort of assembly or conference which was likely to cause friction with the NEIGM. In reply to Taisena's appeal to the Governor of Assam for the removal of this restrictive order, P.C. Wheeler, Private Secretary to the Governor of Assam, said that the government not only rejected the plea but also warned the petitioners that if they found it necessary for their spiritual welfare to maintain mission on the lines laid down by Roberts and with the assistance of persons nominated and trained by him, the only alternative was to leave Manipur state.

The state authorities not only resolved to the restriction of the movement of native workers under Roberts but also prohibited them from assembling together.

---


34 D.C. Wheeler's letter to Taisena, Seuvon, dated 16th April 1981.
for worship. Writing to the Secretary of State for India, London, W.G. Roberts questioned the legality of government's action in interfering in the matter of religion: "the government had no right to bully the natives to join any mission or sect against their own will". W.G. Roberts further attacked the policy of the government on the ground that persecution of law-abiding people in their own country by the officials of the British government, which was responsible for the good government of the country, was a disgrace to the British prestige. In his letter, dated 4th August 1932 to the Secretary of State for India, W.G. Roberts again strongly pleaded that the people were most loyal and law-abiding but were at the same time determined to have freedom in the matter of religion. To meet these people by giving them their freedom to continue to pursue their religious faith which had been exercised by them for the last twenty years was a small matter for the government but was a very important matter for them. But the appeal proved of no use.

35 W.G. Roberts' Memorandum to the Secretary of State for India, Foreign and Political Department, File No. 456-P, 4 July 1932.

36 W.G. Roberts' letter to the Secretary of State for India, dated 4th August 1932 (Foreign and Political Department, 1932).
Mr P.J. Patrick, Under Secretary of State for India, wrote back that the government saw no need to interfere with the discretion of the local authorities in Assam and Manipur in the matter. 37

Amidst stringent restrictions both from the state government and Coleman's NEIGM, the Independent Church managed to organise itself on a sound footing. There was, however, no marked change in the attitude of the state officials. Mr C. Gimson, who succeeded Higgins as the political agent, did not find it expedient to change his predecessor's policy in so far as the new mission was concerned. On the intervention of Robert Reid, the new Governor of Assam, Gimson, by his official order of 11th April 1941, permitted the Independent Church to look after itself as it desired by employing only bona fide indigenous workers. The order further made it clear that while mission workers from Lushai hills would be permitted to continue to work subject to the approval of the President of the Manipur durbar, the moment they were found wanting in discipline, would be liable to expulsion from the state. 38


38 C. Gimson's order, Political Agent of Manipur, Memo No. 511, G.A./141, 24th April 1941.
Officially, the South-West areas of Manipur continued to be recognised as the field of the NEIGM. With a recommendation from the Governor of Assam, H.H. Coleman approached the maharaja of Manipur for permission to set up a new mission headquarters at Churachandpur. Dr G.G. Crozier was made overall incharge of the mission field, Paul Rostad as a principal in the Bible School and Mrs Ella Rostad as a field treasurer. Although the mission enjoyed solid official backing, its organisational structure was faction-ridden. For reason of administrative convenience, it was divided into several regional-based presbyteries which were subsequently replaced by community-based or dialectal presbyteries. This was an obstacle for a healthy development of an organised and unified church life. Naturally, as in-group consciousness became stronger, each and every community, however small it might be, began to think that one's mother was the best means by which one could worship, read and study the Bible. There was an element of truth in it. But since this was carried out to the extreme, there was no possibility of the different communities under the NEIGM coming together under one assembly. When the matter

40 Ibid., p.24.
41 Ibid., p.23.
was referred to H.H. Coleman, General Secretary of the Home Council in Philadelphia, he readily affirmed that he would not in the least bother about the expenditure if worship in every tongue would contribute to the speedier growth of churches among the different communities. In a way, the missionaries fostered linguistic exclusivities. The NEIGM eventually became a sort of de jure supreme body, but divided at its bottom.

3.2 Inter-Denominational Rivalry

On the whole the working relationship between the Welsh mission and Baptist mission in Lushai hills was cordial. However, sectarianism and denominational distinctions which existed in the home missions was usually imparted to the newly established churches too. While doctrinal difference was mainly responsible for inter-denominational conflicts, dissatisfaction within one denomination in matters of discipline and organisation could also generate a desire to form or lead a separate denomination. The case in point was the conflict between the Welsh mission and the Salvation Army in Lushai hills.

3.2.1 Conflict between the Welsh Mission and the Salvation Army

It began with Mr Kawkhuma who, having divorced his wife, married again another wife and this was considered by the Welsh mission a serious breach of doctrine. Unable to compromise with the church disciplinary action,
Kawlkhuma joined the officers' training course of the Salvation Army Corps at Bombay and upon his completion of the training started the Salvation Army movement in Aizawl. Thus any attempt on the part of the Salvation Army to establish a church in Lushai hills was considered by the Welsh mission as an encroachment into their mission field. Naturally charges and counter-charges ensued. The Salvation Army alleged that the superintendent's refusal to station their European officer was primarily because of an opposition from the Welsh mission. On the other hand, the Welsh mission charged that the Salvation Army claimed to have the right to go to any place in any part of the world, even if other Christian bodies might have already done good and effective work in the place concerned. In order to clear this misunderstanding, the Welsh mission representatives comprising of F.J. Sandy, Pengwen Jones and E.J. Mendus met J. Melling, Chief Secretary of the Salvation Army at Calcutta. During the interview, J. Melling told them that he had already received many requests particularly from chiefs.

42 Statement regarding the activities of the Salvation Army in Lushai Hills, Calvinistic Mission Archives, Wales.

43 Ibid.
and other influential groups including those people who joined the Salvation Army to return to the Welsh mission.44 At the same time, Melling maintained that if those people continued to hold back from fellowship with Welsh mission and if the community grew which was very probable, according to him, then there would arise a situation with regard to which it would be necessary for the Army to reconsider seriously its decision.45 The Welsh mission then insisted that if these new adherents were officially assured that at no time and under no conditions would the Army again undertake work in their midst, undoubtedly all would return to the Welsh mission. To this Melling did like to commit himself. The fear of the Welsh mission was that multiplication of Christian organisations among the people so simple and primitive, would be a grave and serious step to take.46 This argument was put forward just to enhance their own established position.

44 Interview between Welsh mission representative and J. Melling, Chief Secretary of the Salvation Army, Calcutta, 16th January 1923.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
Mr S.R. Evans, Territorial Commander of the Salvation Army took up the issue with the government of Assam. He complained that the prohibition of the Army to station their officer in Lushai hills was not in conformity with the laws of India and more so with the right of every British subject of the British empire. The stand of the government was that there should not be two parallel religious movements which was likely to disturb the existing peaceful situation and the work of Welsh mission. Enraged by the uncompromising attitude of the Chief Secretary, S.R. Evans sought an interview with the Governor of Assam on the matter by sending copies of his memorandum to the Commissioner of the hill state, and to the Superintendent of the Lushai hills.

On the other hand, J.C. Evans of the Welsh Mission, Shillong, left no stone unturned to impress upon the government of Assam on the unwisdom and inadvisability of allowing the Salvation Army to enter the Lushai hills. The matter was also referred to the British Council of Missions which supported the stand of the Welsh Mission.

47 S.R. Evans, Territorial Commander to the Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, Shillong, 17 October 1924.
48 Ibid.
49 G.C. Evans, Welsh Mission, Shillong to C.S. Mullan, Officiating Under Secretary to the Government of Assam, Shillong, dated 5th November 1924.
meantime, Mackenzie of Salvation Army approached the local government for sending a European officer whose main objective was to do regular evangelistic work and to bring material benefit to the Lushais through the fostering of a silk industry as a profitable cottage industry. Mackenzie further assured McCall, the Superintendent of Lushai hills that it was the desire of the Salvation Army to avoid clash with any other missionary movement in the Lushai hills and the very presence of a European officer would help towards the modification and solution of any matters which might take on a controversial nature. The offer seemed to be very attractive to the government but at the same time, it involved a change in the present policy. Therefore, McCall felt it necessary to seek the opinion of the Welsh missionaries and wanted to know from them whether the latter had any objection to the proposal. Mendus refused to give his own opinion on the matter and so requested the permission from the Superintendent to place the matter before the directors at home board and that pending their reply no decision should be taken on the question. In trying to repudiate Mackenzie's proposal,

50 McCall, Superintendent, Lushai hills, to E.L. Mendus, Aizawl, 3 January 1934.

51 Ibid.

Mendus also added: "Our strong conviction based on a knowledge of these hills that the presence of a European officer instead of modifying would accentuate the issues and serious embitterment ensued which would have its repercussions not only on religious but also on social and political relationships, which at present were such a happy native". 53 Unduly over-antagonistic, the Welsh missionaries tended to look upon the Salvation Army as having the effect of introducing such a magnificent change which would encompass all the aspects of Lushai life, whether religious or no religious, the pressure on the Salvation Army was designed to keep them out of the Lushai hills, particularly in view of the great areas of Bengal in which more aggressive evangelistic work was needed. 54 But this was to misread the intention of the Salvation Army. Whenever they were asked recognition by any local people, their policy was to grant that recognition, if the SA rules were conformed to, and then to reorient them to their methods of services and worship. The argument which seemed to justify the SA's move was that it had a following of 1500 to 2000 and thus necessitated the stationing of an officer to guide and shepherd them. 55

53 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
Conscious of their right to spiritual hegemony in the whole hill territory, the Welsh missionaries interpreted, rightly or wrongly, the government's policy of keeping the Lushai hills a closed preserve from all foreign elements to include the keeping out of their religious sects too, obviously implying the Salvation Army. 56 Their fear even led them to make surprising speculations that the entry of SA would have the tendency of weakening the present form of village government. Such being the attitude of the Welsh mission which had so long been by experience in the good book of the government, the latter could not but keep the question of allowing freedom of access for any other religious sects in abeyance. When the Governor of Assam granted permit to SA to station a European officer in Silchar with freedom for him to use Tipaimukh road up to Aizawl, the Superintendent of Lushai hills was so annoyed 57 that he wrote sharp letters to protest but with no effect. The government could prevent, for a time being a European officer from entering the Lushai hills, but they did not have this same control over the native leaders. Every communion of Christians

56 Lewis Evans, Aizawl to A.G. McCall, Superintendent, Lushai Hills, Aizawl, 9th June 1934.

57 Lewis Evans, Aizawl to Oliver Thomas, Liverpool, 15th June 1934.
had the right to their own ministrations and were free
to engage in any Christian work of which they were capable.
The controversy was thus should such activities warrant
any missionary society undertaking missionary operations
in such field?

3.2.2 Conflict between the Welsh Mission and
the Roman Catholics

The principle of the comity of Protestant Missions
working in India could only be enforced among the signa-
tory members. The question of applying this principle
did not arise in so far as other organisations were con-
cerned. If they could forestall the inroad of the SA,
another Protestant sect, for sometime, they could not do
the same to Catholics. In fact, the Welsh missionaries
became panicky when one of the Catholic priests (a French
Canadian) visited Aizawl in 1925. To counter the
Catholic intrusion, they thought that the people should
be properly grounded in the fundamental truths of the
Gospel thereby tending to make Catholic as if it were
ungospel and un-Christian. They also thought it incumbent
upon them to occupy as many villages as possible with
schools in order to safeguard their churches from the
inroads of the Roman Catholics. Because villages

58 D.E. Jones' Report (1926), p.44.
without school would give, according to them, the Catholics the necessary openings to start their work. It was in most cases through the school that the Roman Catholics made their presence felt in the missionary field. The fear that continually haunted the Welsh missionaries was that the government would not refuse the Catholics permission as in the case of the SA. As anticipated, the Catholics got the permission to work in Lushai hills consequent upon the visit of two Catholic priests to Aizawl in 1935. The Welsh mission, therefore, felt the urgent need of establishing school in every village as the best means of forestalling them in starting work in the villages. The Welsh mission was convinced that singly it would not be able to combat or compete with the Catholics which had an enormous financial resources. Thus, opposition to Catholics was taken on a war footing when E.L. Mendus represented the Welsh mission in the annual conference of the Assam Baptist Mission at Gauhati in December 1-6, 1936. After a prolonged discussion of the so-called Roman Catholic 'menace', the conference expressed its anxiety at the present situation and one means, perhaps, the chief means they could spell out was the systematic re-orientation of missions and churches in the principles

60 Ibid., p.62.
62 Annual Conference of the Assam Baptists Mission, Gauhati, December 1-6, 1936, p.32.
of the Protestant faith. The conference also felt that it was poorly informed on the matter and therefore asked Dr. Sword, E.L. Mendus and T.E. Pugh to collect specific information of Roman Catholic activity in its various forms in preparation for more effective strategy. The motivating forces behind the establishment of some of the most prestigious institutions of learning in the northeast by Catholics were, in fact, to steal a march on the Protestants and to win favour from the colonial government and hence directly or indirectly brought benefit to all Catholic mission work in the region.

3.3 Controversy over the Institution of 'Slavery' and its Implications on Mission-Government Relations

There is a tendency to dismiss the controversy over the institution of 'slavery' in Lushai hills as simply a conflict between one missionary and one civil officer without looking into the multifarious dimensions and particularly its serious political implications. Should the missionary confine himself to religious instruction and other humanitarian works only? Should he be conformed to the existing corrupted social structures in which he was working? What were the implications of accepting financial

---

63 Ibid.
64 *Indian Church History Review*, II, ISSN, 0014-4530, December 1980, p.136.
grants or endowments from colonial government for such works. These were some of the vexatious questions that emerged out of the controversy.

3.3.1 The Controversy

Prompted solely by conscience and moral courage, Dr. Peter Fraser assumed an uncompromising attitude of hostility towards some of the objectionable customs, more precisely the 'slave' system among the Lushais and other kindred tribes of the Northeast India. His condemnation of the 'slave' system was indeed in close conformity with the essence of Christianity and British law. The circular of the Welsh Mission which was sent to missionaries in Lushai hills on the 18th March 1910 did not, in an unequivocal term, condone slavery in any shape or form.

"Do not condone slavery in any shape or form, as we believe it to be contrary to the very essence of Christianity and to British law, and if it be proved that slavery is a part and parcel of the 'bawli' system, that part of it should, in our opinion, be abolished at the earliest moment".  

In order to have a clear perspective of the controversy, a review of the historical development of the institution of 'slavery' must begin with an understanding of its

65 Foreign Department, External Affairs Proc., September 1911, nos. 5-21, p. 5.
socio-economic base. It is, first of all, to be noted that there was no born slave other than those born of slavery in a tribal society. Among the Kukis and Chins real slavery used to exist, and men and women were sold like cattle. 66

There were different kinds of slaves in a Lushai society. Broadly, the slaves could be divided into two categories: the captive slaves and the non-captive slaves. The captive slaves were those persons taken against their will by capture during inter-tribal wars. They could be sold. 67 The non-captive slaves were those who entered the chief’s house at their own will to become slaves of the chief. They could be sub-divided into three groups:

(1) Chensen (Che = dao, sen = red) slaves were criminals like murderers who took refuge in the chief’s house to escape vengeance and so became slaves of the chief;

(2) Tuklut (enter by promise) slaves were those who deserted the losing side in war and joined the victors by promising to become slaves with all their descendants; and (3) inquisung (inpu = big house; sung = within) slaves were those who had


been driven because of poverty, sickness or distress to take refuge in the chief’s house. With the introduction of colonial administration in the hills, conditions productive of the captive slave, and the first two types of non-captive slaves ceased to exist. It was on the last type of ‘slavery’ (Inpuising bawi) that the controversy arose. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse the customary laws and beliefs that governed the socio-economic base of such slavery institution.

In return for what was almost paternal care, the inpuising slave was expected to work on the same lines within his or her physical capacity in a tribal social framework. He shared all the comforts and perquisites common to most chiefs’ establishments. This is one side of the picture. The other side is that there was a social stigma on bawis. Moreover, bawi-ship was inheritable. Even after his separation from his master’s house (the chief’s house) he continued to be known as inhrang (in = house, hrang = separate) slave. As a matter of fact, under no circumstances, the slave could gain freedom and all the

68 Ibid., pp.97-98. See also, Rodumga Pudaite, The Education of the Hmar People (Sielmat, Churachandpur, Manipur, 1963), pp.54-55.
69 A.G. McCall, op.cit., p.123.
children born of *impunung* slaves and *inhrang* slaves automatically became 'slaves', a position which implied a sense of physical surrender without choice, the acceptance of liability with no part in its creation. At most, a bawí could change his master provided he joined another chief, as the Lushai chiefs tended to look upon themselves as the ruling group. But his liability remained the same. In the past there was no question of freeing the bawí because he had additional value from the Lushai standpoint as it was believed that the services of slaves extended to life after death and the slaves along with those killed in tribal warfare would serve the chief. There was an instance, though exceptional, that the big stone over one Lushai chief's grave near Aizawl marked one place where his slave was, it was said, buried alive with him.

The misunderstanding started over the interpretation of the term 'bawí'. The administration held the view that the bawís were not real slaves, whereas all the missionaries both in the South Lushai and North Lushai hills regarded the institution as a form of slavery and

---

70 B.C. Allen, Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to the Secretary of the Government of India, Foreign Department, no. 335, Dacca, 4th February 1911, p. 9.
were anxious for its immediate and complete abolition.71 The term 'bawi' was also translated by Lorrain and Savidge in their Lushai dictionary as 'slave' or 'retainer', while, according to others, 'serf' would be a closer equivalent in English. Since the bawis could not gain freedom, the only possibility of these bawis being freed was to pay ransom money of Rs 40/- or one mithun to the chief concerned.72 Following the consensus resolution reached among the missionaries themselves, Dr P. Fraser thus spearheaded the campaign and began to put pressure on the superintendent for the abolition of the 'bawi' system as speedily as possible.73 But the latter would be prepared to carry out the suggestion in so far as he deemed it to do so in the present state of the country. At first, Fraser was perhaps given to understand that the chiefs would welcome his offer to liberate the bawis by paying the ransom money. In fact, he did liberate about 40 bawis at his own instance.74 But the moment a large number of

71 P. Fraser, Mary C. Fraser and W.R. Roberts' joint memorandum to H.H. King George V, Aizawl, Lushai Hills, 10th September 1910, p.2.
72 Ibid., p.2.
73 Ibid., p.2.
74 Ibid., pp.2-3.
bawis sought his help to secure their freedom, Fraser felt incumbent upon him to ask the government to direct that an enquiry be made into the whole matter with the object of proclaiming all the bawis free, and of providing compensation to the chiefs. It was at this stage that the controversy touched upon a different dimension.

Acting on the superintendent's report, B.C. Allen, Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, argued that Fraser's 'propaganda' had been productive of the greatest discontent and that his course of action, if not checked, might result in a general uprising in the hills. He further emphatically observed that it was not for the missionary to dictate which tribal customs should or should not be recognised, but it was for the superintendent, who was responsible for the peace of the hills to decide whether the time was ripe for any change. The government had thus before them two choices: either to concede to the abolition of the bawir system or to take the extreme step of restricting the movement of the missionary on the pretext of preserving public peace in the Lushai hills. Obsessed with fear, the latter course of action

---

75 K.J. Williams' letter, Secretary WMFM, Liverpool, to the B.C. Allen, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 16th March 1911, p.7.

76 B.C. Allen's letter to Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, dated 4th February 1911, p.7.

77 Ibid., pp.7-8.
was resorted to and Cole, the superintendent thus exerted pressure on Fraser either to leave the Lushai hills or to undertake that during his future presence in the Lushai hills he should confine himself entirely to religious work and medical treatment and refer all secular matters to the superintendent or his assistants.78 To this, Fraser replied: "... when the territory comes under the British flag - slavery has to be abolished and all slaves set free. I cannot surrender the right to take action against an evil, even though it be an established custom and policy".79 D.E. Jones, the colleague of Fraser, was of the view that the influence of every Christian missionary throughout the world, not to speak of Lushai hills alone, was against the abuses whether permitted by government or not. But he could not make a firm stand on what he thought was right. In fact, sensing the hardened attitude of his colleague (Fraser) he became rather nervous because Cole told him privately that if the Welsh mission would not work conjointly with government then he would call another mission to take the work up in

78 Letter from the Government of East Bengal and Assam, No.45-C.G.T. Foreign Department (1911).
79 Fraser's letter to Cole, 23 February 1911.
their stand. 80 R.J. Williams, Secretary of the WCWM, Liverpool, on the pressure of the Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam then appealed to Fraser that the latter should be agreeable to the government, consult his colleagues and never take any independent action on such question which might affect the relation between mission and government. In the event of his finding himself unable to agree with the majority of the members of the mission, he would only appeal to the directors at home. 81 But Fraser remained firm and said that the 'great commission' included suggestions for sound legislation for the demolition of existing corrupted structures and for the advancement of Christian civilization. 82 No less resolute was his wife, Mary C. Fraser who also believed that 'if my husband signed this agreement he will be betraying Jesus'. 83 In the meantime, compelled by the seriousness and urgency of the situation, the special district committee of Welsh mission, in its

80 D.E. Jones to R.J. Williams, Aizawl, 24th September 1910.
81 R.J. Williams to Dr. P. Fraser, 16 March 1911.
82 J. Fraser to R.J. Williams, 27 April 1911.
83 Mary C. Fraser's letter to the District Committee, Shillong, 28 June 1911.
emergency meeting at Shillong, discussed the pros and cons of the whole issue which was a sort of relief to Fraser. Because an unanimous opinion expressed that attempts should be made to secure as soon as possible the abolition by government of the *bawi* system in Lushai hills.  

But the decision of the conference of the executive committee of the home mission came to him as a blow which demanded, among others, promise of undertaking that Fraser was to cooperate with his fellow missionaries and with directors and that he should not approach government on behalf of the mission or regarding any political or social question unless his fellow missionaries and the directors agreed with him.  

Pained by this sudden loss of support, Fraser decided to take personal action by letting the Anti-Slavery Society and the British public know about the *bawi* system in Lushai hills.  

The issue was even raised in the House of Commons by John Gardine on 12th June 1913 and in his reply to John Gardine's question, Montagu, the Under Secretary of State for India endorsed the action taken by superintendent in Lushai hills in banishing P. Fraser whose

84 Minutes of the Special District Committee, Shillong, 27-29 June 1911.  
conduct, it was feared, was likely to provoke an armed uprising with its punitive consequences.86 Joining the debate, W.E. White in his article in 'Indian Witness' dated 4th September 1913 made a scathing attack on P. Fraser's moral right to oppose the method of a government or to ignore the deliberate judgment of his fellow missionaries and even the instruction of his missionary board in Liverpool, under whose authority and responsibility he came out.87 White contended that even though the government were a very indifferent one and acquiesced in real slavery and kept the people ignorant and refused to make laws and roads for the better management and progress of the people, he thought it to be a doubtful procedure for a religious teacher to interfere in politics.88 To justify his point, White maintained that David Livingstone deplored the slave trade in America, but he worked more effectively by his Christian teaching and character than by directly antagonising the local authorities with inflammatory propaganda of his own.89


87 W.E. White's article, "The Relation of Missionaries to the Government and to their own Mission Councils" in Indian Witness, dated 4th September 1913, p.19.

88 Ibid., p.19.

89 Ibid., p.19.
This was indeed a docile or compromising attitude which White had prescribed for a missionary in the face of indifferent or bad government. His pro-government stand was clearly manifested when he said that Dr Fraser's actions were bound to make the government more chary in encouraging missionary effort among the people. He further argued that while it was right to allow due weight to Dr Fraser's opinions and most right to respect his conscience, it was equally right to allow due weight to the opinion of the officials who, in his opinion, had been chastened by a longer experience of the problems of India.\textsuperscript{90}

The weakness of White's argument was that he expected only the missionary to compromise and not the government. In condemning the \textit{bawi} system, Fraser did not perhaps claim that he was wiser than the government and more alert in defence of freedom than his fellow missionaries. The simple fact was that he deplored what he considered to be against the Christian principle and British law.\textsuperscript{91}

Because of Fraser's continued pressure both upon the British government and the government of India, the local government was no longer reluctant to arrive at some basic principles in regard to the \textit{bawi} system.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p.20.

\textsuperscript{91} P. Fraser to R.J. Williams, London, 26 May 1913.
The principles in question were the following: (1) that the use of the word 'bawi' should, as far as possible, be discontinued; (2) that claims for bawi-man (ransom money) should be treated exactly like the claims which any Lushai, not a chief, might advance against any persons to whom he had given board and lodging; (3) that claims against any one family of 'bawis' should not exceed Rs 40/-; (4) that it should be widely made known that it was not open to a chief to take back forcibly any bawi who had left his service, the only admissible course being for him to apply to the courts, and ask to have his claim for compensation decreed. That it should similarly be made known that any bawi discontented with his lot was free, either to leave the service of his chief and allow the latter to apply to the courts for compensation, or himself to appeal to the courts to record an order that he was no longer a bawi; (5) that any other question in connection with the bawi system should be decided according to universal Lushai custom as binding on all Lushais, no distinction being made between the chiefs and ordinary people. 92

Although the bawi system was not yet abolished on its entirety, the above principles as agreed upon by the local officials and the missionaries was indeed a great

92 W.J. Reid, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, Shillong, 2 February 1914, p.10.
moral victory for Fraser. Increasingly aware of the need for its gradual abolition, Austen Chamberland, Secretary of State for India, in his letter to the Governor-General in Council, dated 29 October 1915 once again made it clear that the principles of British government could no longer countenance the existence of slavery within its borders and reiterated that the sole purpose of the government of India and of the local governments was to ensure speedy termination of all practices that in varying degrees approximate to slavery. 93 He, however, stressed that he had no desire to press for a sudden and violent dislocation of existing conditions. Because he was afraid that such attempts might considerably lead to bloodshed. What Austin Chamberland wanted to convey, in short, was the effectual suppression of slavery, wherever they existed within the frontiers of India. 94

In the light of these suggestions, the government of Assam was called upon to examine the general question of suppression of customs approximating to slavery not only in Lushai hills but also in other regions on the frontier of Assam. B.C. Allen's findings confirmed beyond

93 Foreign and Political Department, Secret E., Pros., December 1915, Nos.14-16, p.2.
94 Ibid., p.2.
dbubt that there were practices or customs which had the
tinge of slavery in the regularly administered as well as
the unadministered areas of the province of Assam. He
then assured the government of India that he would do
everything in his power to discourage the practice even
to the extent of paying compensation to the concerned
slave-owners.

As regards to the Lushai hills, W.Z. Scott, the
Superintendent, also had completed the census of bawis.
According to him, the number of families of indwelling
bawis was recorded at 316, comprising 476 bawis, of whom
119 were males between the ages of 16 and 60; and 357
were women and children. As regards to outdwelling
bawis, the number of houses was 1,110 and the number of
heads of families or youngest sons (who inherited their
father's bawi-ship) was 1,123 of whom 1,061 were between
the ages of 16 and 60. The total number of families
or houses was thus 1,426, but the peculiar customs with
regard to bawis prevalent among the Chins and Lakthers in
one area of South Lushai hills made it necessary to pay
the redemption price or ransom money in respect of indi-
viduals and not, as in the remainder of the district.

95 Ibid., p.1.
96 Foreign and Political Department, F.No.522-
external (1923), p.4.
97 Ibid., p.4.
in respect of families. Consequently, the total number of cases in which the redemption price to be paid was 1,626. The figures were, of course, only approximate, but were sufficiently accurate to justify and estimate that the initial expenditure in redeeming all the bawis in the district to be about Rs 65.00/=. In order to take further action on the issue, the government of India pressurised the government of Assam to submit a deficit budget to their legislative council in spite of retrenchment and of the omission of provision for many schemes which were much more urgent than this reform in the Lushai hills. In those circumstances, the government of Assam was compelled to ask the central government to finance the scheme. It should be noted that under the influence of Christian teachings, the tendency of the Christian chiefs was either to release the bawis altogether or at the worst, to treat them on an entirely different footing. In freeing his slaves,
one Christian chief wrote thus: "In the name of Lord Jesus Christ, I free you from your slavery. In like manner as you are free from me, from slavery, be freed from the slavery of sin and believe in Jesus, then you will have eternal life." 102 Other Christian chiefs freed their slaves either in the name of Jesus Christ or King George V.

3.3.2 Towards Reconciliation

Many vexatious questions arose out of the controversy in connection with the future relations between Christian missions and government. One glaring weakness of the Christian missions was that they failed to carry out in practice the fundamental non-conformist principles of churches, particularly, freedom from state endowments. In the end, they found themselves in an awkward position because acceptance of state endowment in the form of financial assistance greatly curtailed their freedom in matters of religion and conscience. 103

The commission which was instituted by the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, failed to concretise a more scientific workable basis beyond the suggestion for a thorough reorganisation and closer coordination among various mission societies so as to utilize

102 F. Fraser to H.J. Williams, Micawi, dated 11th July 1910.

103 See for example, F. Fraser's letter to the District Committee, Welsh Mission, Shillong, 14 September 1911, p.1.
mission experience and focus missionary sentiment on any emergent matter of importance. One novel suggestion was the centralization of missionary efforts in India in the body of a central board of the various missionary societies to enter into official communication with the government on any issues which were of mutual importance both to the government and to the missionaries.104

Another suggestion of the commission in regard to the attitude of missionaries towards civil authorities was that the Christian missionaries should continue to exercise their influence for the removal of any gross oppression and injustice, particularly where the government was in the hands of men of their own race or nationality. This was indeed a significant development in that the Christian missionaries asserted their rights as citizens of 'enlightened communities' so that they could form their own convictions unhindered as to the wisdom or unwisdom of the colonial policy, they saw in operation around.105

The right use of this influence, the commission hoped, might control the actions of both government and individuals. What had gradually emerged was thus a growing solidarity and independence among the missionaries as a group.


105 Ibid., p.3.
On the other hand, as the government officials felt more and more insecure because of the gradual emergence of national consciousness, they made frantic efforts to enter into closer cooperation with the missionaries. This was so because they find in no other agency a more helpful partner than in the Christian missions. McCall, the superintendent of Lushai hills, started advising the missionaries that they should henceforth adopt a broader approach which would encompass the needs of the whole community and not merely of the church. This is to say that the missionary's message should not confine to the spread of the Gospel alone but also extend to the practical and logical consummation of each teaching within the heart and character of every member of their churches. McCall was perhaps worried that the churches might be used as a means for entrenching the missionaries themselves in a sort of isolation relying only upon their ability and power to preach the gospel. In fact, the matter seemed to be so urgent and grave concern to the officials because they began to see the power for potential good lying in the hands of missionaries. Thus, in view of the considerable

107 Ibid., p.2.
108 Ibid., p.2.
influence which the church had upon the people, the officials unhesitatingly appealed to the missionaries that the church must vitally touch the lives of the people - help to improve their material welfare - practical improvements in the daily village relations and induce a sense of discipline and obligation to God to replace the removal of the old discipline of fear and superstition and social exactions for social offences. 109 Both sides, of course, were aware that they were at one on the need for revitalising religious teaching in the direction of social welfare and discipline. In such endeavours, the government relied heavily on the church to create public opinion in the matter of practical social conditions in village life to support the government's efforts in applying justice in the hope that the best interests of the people would thereby be served. 110

The method of control of the people through the ruling chiefs by the officials and through the new educated groups in mission stations by the missionaries miserably failed them to make contact with the people - the masses. Realizing the fallacies of such policy, McCall lamentably warned the missionaries that the reason for

109 Ibid., p.2.
his inability to reach the people was the small circle of vested interests and materially satisfied parties, (implying the ruling chiefs and black-coatists). 111

Conscious of the position in which he was placed, McCall, therefore, called upon the missionaries to initiate changes so as to coordinate and to revitalise all those leaders: church, schools, government, and chiefs into a clear-cut direction of service to the masses. The scheme which McCall had in mind was the organisation of village welfare committees, representative of all local interests to advise and guide the ruling chiefs. 112 There was an apparent contradiction in the scheme that while no theological or sectarian issues could be discussed, the very existence of such committees would, the officials hoped, create an inspiration to apply in practice the teachings of Christianity more and more firmly; and their flowery appeal runs thus: "Let the religious teachers, once outside their churches, be invited to place at the disposal of humanity all their energies in a desire to further the practical application of Christianity throughout the hills through these local welfare committees,

111 Black-coatism involved monthly salaries which secured the beneficiary from subjection to the inevitability of traditional village life. See A.G. McCall, op.cit., p.205.

112 Ibid., p.3.
advised only by the main headquarters committee encouraging improvements unanimously supported. This will revitalise, re-discipline and create a magnificent people". Feeling more and more insecure because of the war (Second World War), the officials thought in term of channelising the aspirations of the people towards cultural development and reiterated that hundreds of teachers, church-men and the strength of church could perform such task. The officials tended to look upon the new undertaking as if it were of national concern and more so when they felt that the methods of discharging their duty were increasingly under the microscope of international criticism.

Although it was made to appear that the welfare of the indigenous population was uppermost in the minds of the officials, the real intention of revitalising or re-disciplining of the people through such welfare committees was just to enhance the war-efforts. Not unnaturally, the missionaries had shown a lukewarm attitude towards such schemes. In fact, E.L. Mendus, who was ready to act as Vice-President of the Red Cross Committee for the Lushai Hills, had to resign the post when the committee was changed into a General War Purposes Committee at the cost of causing a great strain on his friendship with the

113 Ibid., p.3.
superintendent. The decision was both shocking and disturbing because the superintendent feared that it might have a damaging effect on the attitude and loyalty of the mission workers, and it might eventually tell against the war efforts. The impaired friendship was, however, healed soon and this fact was clearly testified by McCall's farewell letter from Sylhet to E.L. Mendus: "Your work and mine have been closely interdependent and each has been inspired by the common aim of bringing strength and happiness to an interesting people. I was the transitory partner; you represented the permanency".116 This, no doubt, succinctly explained both the position of the officials and the missionaries in relation to the subject peoples. But since there was no any close intermingling of the two at the ideological level, under the apparent interdependence of actions, there was a current of inner contradictions.

---

115 E.L. Mendus' Report (MSS), 1922-1944, p.15.