1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the predictions of social scientists in the late 19th and 20th centuries regarding the dissolution of religion and the inevitable secularization of the world, religion is still as important and relevant as it had always been even in today’s self-proclaimed modern, globalized world (Casanova 1994, 2001). Much academic attention has been given to the uncomfortable tension between globalization and religion, particularly in the context of religion and violence (Asad 2003, 2008, Modood 2007). Interestingly where we find Anthropology of, for example, Islam, an Anthropology of Christianity still struggles to fully emerge (Cannell 2005, Robins 2007). Christianity, in its various forms, is no longer an isolated narrative of the West but has become a central story for understanding the world especially the people that seek to construct their lives in Christian terms (Jenkins 2003: Keane 2007).

Christianity is associated with western culture and civilization. The early converts associated themselves with British rulers as they adopted their religion and imbibed their style of life, food, clothing, naming, manners and attitude. Thus Christianity demands a better life-style from its converts.

No one can deny the fact that the tribal people in Northeast India were exposed to the western world after the arrival of Christian missionaries. Along with the Christian faith they received, they were told that everyone was counted, every
individual mattered and everyone had a right to life, property and above all a separate identity that is unique in culture, tradition and habits.

Amidst the establishment of churches and the spread of Christian faith, there is a growing consciousness about individual tribal identities on the one hand and the pan-Naga identity on the other. The latter is recently gaining momentum and this is evident in the territorial demands they are making for the Naga tribes of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The articulation of tribal identities is not a recent phenomenon. It started ever since they received education with the help of Christian missionaries, who started working amongst the Tangkhuls as early as 1896. Prior to the introduction of Christianity, they followed their traditional belief system known as *Hau*. Historically, it is seen that only with the advent of Christianity and its religious influence that *Hau* and its adherents began to dwindle gradually. Over the years, the conversion to Christianity has accelerated and this tribal religion was affected. Today, almost all the Tangkhuls are Christians.

It is evident from the above brief discussion that Christianity has been the most important force in the life of the Naga tribes in general and Tangkhuls in particular. While this goes unquestioned a lot remains to be known about the impact of Christianity on a tribe like the Tangkhuls living particularly in the urban milieu. It also remains to be explored if the urban milieu in itself has facilitated the spread of Christianity amongst them. The present study sought to understand the influence of Christianity on the Tangkhuls of Manipur.
1.2 Review of Literature

1.2.1 Anthropology of Christianity

Despite the predictions of social scientists in the late 19th and 20th centuries regarding the dissolution of religion and the inevitable secularization of the world, religion is as important and relevant as it has always been in today’s self-proclaimed modern, globalized world (Casanova 2001, 1994). In the words of Casanova ‘globalization affects all cultural systems, including religious ones. Globalization threatens to dissolve the intrinsic link between sacred time, sacred space and sacred people common to all world religions, and with it the seemingly essential bonds between histories, peoples and territories, which have defined all civilizations. The contemporary salience of religious movements around the globe, and the torrent of commentary on them by scholars and journalists, has made it plain that religion is by no means disappearing in the modern world.’ The “resurgence of religion” has been welcomed by many as a means of supplying what they see as a needed moral dimension to secular politics and environmental concerns (Asad 2003). Much academic attention has been given to the uncomfortable tension between globalization and religion, particularly in the context of religion and violence (Asad 2003; 2008; Modood 2007).

Indeed, the link between religion, secularism, globalization and modernity form a complex constellation that extends far beyond any one-world religion (Smith 2008). Interestingly where we find anthropology of Islam that is able to provide comparative analysis on pressing issues, anthropology of Christianity still struggles to
fully emerge (Cannell 2005, Robins 2007). In fact even recognizing that absence is notoriously hard to explain, in this case the effort to do so prove instructive. Broadly speaking, one can distinguish two kinds of factors that might have suppressed the development of anthropology of Christianity. We can call one kind of factor cultural and the other theoretical. Christians are too similar by virtue of drawing on the same broad cultural tradition as anthropologists, and too meaningfully different by virtue of drawing on a part of that tradition that in many respects has arisen in critical dialogue with the modernist ideas on which anthropology is founded. Both the similarities and the differences make Christianity more difficult than other religions for anthropologists to study (Robbins 2003). Christianity, in its various forms, is no longer an isolated narrative of the west but has become a central story for understanding the world after colonialism and the many people and communities that seek to construct their lives in Christian terms (Jenkins 2003, Keane 2007). The last decade has seen a remarkable increase in interest in Christianity among scholars in the social sciences and humanities and among public intellectuals. This attention to Christianity has followed on its recent growth, especially in the global South, and its increasing public political role in many parts of the world (Robbins and Matthew 2010).

1.2.2 Christianity in India

The major religions and philosophical traditions of the world had their origin in Asia, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions. Christianity has its roots in the East. The apostles took up with courage and conviction the challenge and responsibility to ‘go into all the world and preach the
The teachings of Jesus reached well beyond the Jews, transforming the moral and spiritual life of individuals of different classes and races. The increasing mobility of people and the growth of cosmopolitanism have also encouraged the expansion of Christianity (George 2009). Indian Christianity may be as old as the religion itself. Church tradition and legend trace the beginnings of Indian Christianity to the evangelical works of St. Thomas—one of the twelve disciples of Jesus—who arrived in Southwest India in about AD 52. Though spread throughout the country, major concentrations of Christians are found in the South Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the western state of Goa, and the tribal belt of Bihar and Assam. While there is ample- even abundant- scholarly interest in non-Christian religious traditions of India, the heritage and strength of Indian Christianity is reflected very meagerly in scholarly literature (Raj 2002). An interesting experiment of giving Christianity an Indian feel was made by the Italian Jesuit, Robert de Nobili, who founded the Madura Mission. Seeing that conversions by the Portuguese were contemptuously looked down in India, he wore a sacred thread, put on the robe of the Indian Sanyasin, practiced vegetarianism and ablutions, appeared in the sacred city of Madura as a ‘Roman Brahmin’, and propounded a fifth Veda in which the tenets of Christianity were presented in a language similar to the Hindus (Jeyaseelan 1996).

India, the world's most populous democracy and officially a secular nation, is haunted by a stark assault on one of its fundamental freedoms. In eastern State of Orissa, during the religious clashes, Christian families were being forced to abandon their faith in exchange for their safety (Sengupta 2008). However, in the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the dynamics of cultural and religious interaction on the
The subcontinent were significantly changed by the new Protestant and Catholic missionary movements from Europe and America. From 1813, missionaries were working all through the century. The presence of the missionary thrived under the protective structures of British imperial rule. Christianity was also highly visible on the sub-continent as a defining mark of a ruling race and a central element in their relation between rulers and the majority of the subjects (Brown and Robert 2002).

Christianity in India offers a fascinating field for study that includes Syrian Christianity, Roman Catholicism and various forms of Protestantism and Evangelicalism. Ecologically, one covers pockets of concentration in the North East region, the central plains, and the southern and western coasts of India (and some inland areas). Both caste and tribal communities have been drawn into the fold of Christianity in different places, and among the former both the highest and lowest groups. Some Christian communities have existed for hundreds of years, while others have not completed a century in the faith (Robinson 2003). Christianity has spread quite widely among the tribals in different parts of the country. It is more evidently so among the tribes of the North Eastern region of the country. Christianity could not obliterate the traditional caste system among the converts (from Hinduism). Their dress habits, food and language remain the same as their Hindu neighbours (Burman 1977: 201-211).

1.2.3 Christianity in North East India

Church history of North East India is credited to F.S. Downs for his many years of research in his studies on Christianity in Northeast India. The Mighty Works of God: A
Brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India: The Mission Period 1836-1950, published in the year 1971, was his first detailed study. The book was fundamentally on institutional histories. In the words of the CHAI (Church History Association of India) Editorial Board “Guidelines” it was still “internal history” in which “the Church is viewed as a relatively self-contained unit which acted upon and was acted upon by the society outside.” It mirrored the nationalist historical perspective in which a study was made of how mission controlled programmes and institutions became church controlled; studies of how Indians took over from foreigners. By and large it was also denominational rather than ecumenical or regional.

The CHAI “Guidelines” propose to go beyond that. They identify four ingredients in the perspective from which the CHAI history of Christianity is to be written: (1) the socio-cultural, (2) the regional, (3) the national, and (4) the ecumenical.

Church History Association of India has produced excellent volumes on History of Christianity in India. Of note: History of Christianity in India, Vol. 5: North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (1992), is authored by Frederick S. Downs. His book on Christianity in North-East India: Historical Perspectives (1983) is an updated and revised form of which has been published in the CHAI series.

While the book is by no means entirely successful in incorporating the perspectives of the CHAI “Guidelines”, it has attempted to do so. Its main weakness
is the failure to fully integrate what he identified as the three main components in the history of the Christian movement in the Northeast—the political, the ecclesiastical and the socio-cultural. He tried to achieve this integration through the common theme of identity, which he felt is the key to understanding the nature and function of Christianity in this region, particularly in the hill areas where it has had the greatest impact.

His most recent work *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women in North East India* (1996) has referred to three perspectives on the impact of Christianity on the status of women among the hill tribes of North East India. Firstly, it focused on the problems arising out of differing historiographical perspectives on the subject. Secondly, the impact of the western women’s movement on the thought and work of the missionaries who served in North East India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was discussed. Finally, it dealt with the impact on women of missionary activities from the perspective of the local context.

Other church-centred histories relating to the North-East are J. Fortis Jyrwa’s, *The Wondrous Works of God: A Study of the Growth and Development of the Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Church in the 20th Century* (1980); O. Pavioti’s, *The Work of His Hands: The Story of the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati 1934-84* (1987); and David Syiemlieh’s, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Nagaland* (1990). Syiemlieh’s (1990) book is an attempt to critically examine the role of the Church among the Nagas. The study dealt with structures and institutions and the Church’s organization. An extraordinary growth has taken place in the number and quality of institutions and other infrastructures of service, whether they be schools, colleges,
hospitals or dispensaries. The developmental thrusts in Nagaland was given special attention from the mid 1960s when the Church made a significant drive to enter new areas and open new mission centers. The type of Christianity in Nagaland and indeed in the entire hill area of Northeast India continues to be greatly influenced by western forms of Christianity. Syiemlieh (1996) also talked about the presence of Christianity in North East India. He said that Christian missions had established what may be called “spheres of influence” over the peoples of North East India. The Welsh Presbyterians had entrenched themselves in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and in the North Lushai Hills, after a rather dismal start in the Barak Valley; the American Baptists were comfortably located in the Brahmaputra Valley, working among converts and the tea garden labourers, the Garo Hills, the Naga Hills, and the Naga/Kuki inhabited hills of Manipur; the South Lushai Hills were given to the English Baptist Mission; the Catholic Church had found a base in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the two large valleys and at Haflong in the North Cachar Hills. Other small denominations such as the Anglican Church and the Lutheran Mission restricted their work to small Christian groups in the Brahmaputra valley.

1.2.4 Christianity as an important agent of change

There are many scholars who shared the notion that Christianity has been one of the important factors of change in Northeast India. Karotemprel (2009: 51) contends that for better or for worse, no one will deny that Christianity has been one of the most powerful agents of social change in northeast India. Kulirani (2009: 110) said that the most predominant agent of change in North East India is Christianity. Undoubtedly the tribal society in North-East India has undergone immense changes in its
psychology, world-view, languages, cultures, social habits, economic activity etc., as a result of its interaction with Christianity. Obviously, there are many other factors than Christianity that have had a great impact on social transformation in North-East India. The momentum of change has been extraordinary, given the psychology of the tribal society, its democratic ways, aspirations for a new life, simple socio-cultural, theological and philosophical thought patterns favouring quick social transition (Yadav 2000). In Northeast India, the missionaries worked with exemplary zeal and dedication. They negotiated successfully with strange languages, customs and usages of the people, besides the difficult terrain and hostile climate in the hills and the plains of the region. The modern educational institutions, health-care facilities, and the introduction of several arts and crafts, plantations and cultivations owe their origin to the early missionaries who were the pioneers of development in the history of the region. Besides evangelical and humanitarian social works, they also took keen interest in studying the land and the people, their history and culture, language and literature, religions, customs and traditions. In fact, the observations of these missionaries in the form of notes, diaries and correspondence that are preserved in various missionary archives all over the world constitute a primary source as recorded experience of the man on the spot for research in the social history of the region which historians have of late started to use to supplement the British archival materials with encouraging results (Bhattacharjee 1989). The American Baptist Missionaries were the earliest and largest group of foreign missionaries who played a significant role in the socio-economic-cultural life of the people of North-Eastern India (Barpujari 1986). However, the Catholic Church has also undoubtedly
contributed immensely to the process of modernization of the Nagas. It has particularly enhanced education and health care facilities (Syiemlieh 1990). It is clear that whatever the various factors that made socio-cultural change inevitable in the hills areas of North-East India, Christianity was the primary agency in the formation of a new cultural synthesis (Downs 1994).

1.2.5 Religious Conversion

Scholars have different views regarding religious conversion. According to Joshi (2007), religious conversion is the outcome of religious enthusiasm; different collective religious enthusiasms are likely to co-exist in areas of emerging, mixed religion, certainly in modern times, and for centuries beforehand. Heirich (1977) defined religious conversion as “accepting a set of beliefs and practices which is quite different from the system of truth and religious commitment previously experienced”.

Interestingly the question that evolves is what does conversion mean to the Christian missionaries? In theory, they might have been content with Nagas accepting Christian baptism and simply abandoning, as one of them states, ‘the miserable worship patterns handed down to them by their ancestors.’ But in practice they called for a total cultural transformation (Eaton 2000). To Alan de Lastic (1999) an archbishop, conversion is a free, personal and consequently responsible act. A forced conversion is therefore, a contraction in terms. In the Christian belief, conversion is a gift of God. It is not something that can be acquired by right, still less can it be acquired by inducement, or by the offer of rice and jobs.
Downs (1983), has written on the history of Christianity in North East India. According to him, the role of Christianity in social change of the Nagas and other North-East Indian tribes essentially was in terms of “acculturation”; acculturation as a “means” and “agency” for social change, whereby the Nagas adopted another culture or civilization through continuous contact and interactions with Western and Indian people. According to Jolly (1996), to be converted in this sense is to give in by giving up what one wants in favour of the desires of someone else. She speaks on the narrative of converts while dealing with the study of conversion. These narratives are better understood as testimonies. But Joshi (1980) does not appreciate these views. According to her there can be no conversion without change of commitment and commitment in turn must always be as in the case of religious conversion is to always ascertain belief-sets. Conversion must involve: (a) a radical change in the beliefs entertained by the person, (b) as the person is committed to act according to his beliefs, there is consequently a radical change in his behaviour also, (c) in the acceptance or rejection of the belief-system, the believer must be completely free. She goes on to say that in the North-East India we also come across instances where people converted to Christianity without giving up some basic beliefs of his native religion. What is questionable is whether this sort of conversion is accepted by Christianity as a case of true conversion, for Christianity believes that the only true case of conversion is a recognition that the true God is only the Christian God.

Kanito (1980) tries to bring a critical assessment of a mutual adoption between the tribal religions of North East India and Christianity. He says that their gods seem helpless against the evil influence that menacing and exacting demons have over man.
When Christianity informs tribal people that its God is all powerful and supreme over other spirits and demons, the poverty-stricken section were the first to readily accepted Christianity happily. Misra (1980) after studying the phenomenon of mass conversion to Christianity that has taken place (since 1836) in most of the hill regions of Northeast India finds two major factors for conversion, viz., Christians do not observe caste and some believe in their preaching about the truth. In a historical survey of the Manipur Baptist Convention made by Lolly (1985), he provides ample indication for a deeper study on the success missionaries in the past and the ministry or the pioneer national leaders in the cause of the Gospel of Christ when the Tribal society was in profound darkness. Like Kanito (1980) he says that the tribals of Manipur began to embrace Christianity when they realized that only Christ could set them free from the fearful life and bondage to evil spirits and demons. At first conversions did not come in abundance. But once they came, they came in large numbers. Today the Mizos and Nagas are close to 100 percent Christian, while the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos and other tribal groups have a sizeable Christian following (Syiemlieh 1996).

Some scholars regard conversion as an innovative practice that partakes in the transformation of the social without being a mechanical result of it (Veer 1996). Taking the situation of 17th Century France, Veer considers conversion as a means whereby people change their religion as a result of social and political pressures or enticements, such as government posts and pensions. These were the motives behind conversions. Keeping this politics behind conversion in mind, Asad (1996) gives his comments on conversion thus: “there was time when conversion didn’t need
explaining. People converted because God had helped them to see the truth. Religious conversion is usually thought of as ‘irrational’. Most individuals enter a new religion as a consequence of focus beyond their control”. Dirks (1996) thinks differently; according to him conversion is always a relationship of domination even when the means to dominate is much more subtle and even voluntary than in the more general colonial situation. According to Jolly (1996), to be converted in this sense is to give in by giving up what one wants in favour of the desires of someone else. She speaks of narrative of converts while dealing with the study of conversion. These narratives are better understood as testimonies. According to her, conversion is both transitive and intransitive unlike Veer’s (1996) view who finds conversion very materialistic. She gives the Church the credit for holding an essential task of securing the truth through human power. The reasons of conversion of the Aos into Christianity, as perceived by Mills (1973), were (i) the expectation of miraculous results due to a lamentably common frame of mind, where they regarded Christianity as a sort of patent medicine, a dose of which without much after treatment will cure him of and protect him from all ills bodily and spiritually in this world and the next, and (ii) the fear of hell-fire.

There could be many reasons for a person’s conversion from one religion to another. They could be economic, or for the sake of pleasure or even for self-realization. To come to a decision as to which is the specific one is extremely difficult. To determine the one reason as the cause would require us to have a knowledge of a person’s entire past history, his subjective feeling, and so on (Joshi 1980). On the other hand, Miri (1980) opines that if it is accepted that no religion is
superior or inferior to another, “then there is no need for being converted from one religion to another” (K.J. Shah cited in Miri 1980).

1.2.6 Acceptance of the impact of Christianity as a given fact

Talking on the impact of Christianity, many scholars have given their ideas on the various aspects of changes. Smith (1925) wrote, “for a considerable length of time the Ao Nagas, as well as the other Naga tribes, were isolated in the hills where unmolested they went through their narrow round of life, which practically knew no variation from generation to generation.” Elwin (1961:16) remarked, “conversion to Christianity has made other changes: the stress on personal salvation has introduced a new individualism in place of the former community spirit.” It must be admitted that the Christian missionaries proved to be the harbingers of progress to a considerable extent, particularly in the tribal areas. They deserve the credit for stamping out certain savage practices, putting down sanguinary and reprehensible customs and abolishing some evil practices and beliefs based on superstitions, such as headhunting, tribal warfare, inter-tribal feuds, and slavery. As a result, a new era, an era of peace, progress, freedom and security began (Rongsen 1999). The Nagas’ head-hunting past gradually disappeared with the annexation of the region in the nineteenth century by the British and the subsequent introduction of Christianity by the American Baptist Mission (Joshi 2007). Yunuo, a political scientist (1974) wrote on the early history of the Nagas, their relations with the Meiteis, Assamese, Burmese, etc. The changes brought about by the British rulers and the American Christian missionaries in the Naga hills, the background to the revolt against free India’s government, the role of Phizo and other rebel leaders and that of foreigners in it, the events leading to the
formation of the state of Nagaland and the current state of affairs are dealt with in
detail. To him Christianity imprinted the civilization in a considerable degree of
resonance not only to the Naga life but also a far-reaching moral crusade to change
the Naga personality in the direction of self-sacrifice and service of humanity. Singh
(2008) does not deny the fact that the Nagas benefitted from Christian missionaries.
Despite the positive changes that came with conversion – education, medical
facilities, a script for each previously unlettered tribe and other humanitarian services
– the conversion of such large numbers was disturbing to anthropologists and British
administrators (Syiemlieh 1996). Old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions
are being forgotten, the number of Christians or quasi Christians is steadily increasing
and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life (Hutton
1921). The Christian missionaries caused immense damage to the tribal culture; many
institutions received death blows at their hands. Due to the disappearance of
dormitory (morung), the Nagas suffered immense social, cultural and architectural
loss (Kumar 2005). [I]t is very much obvious that the western missionaries while
replacing the ancient Nagas’ faith with the new faith of Christianity, did all to bring
about total change in the ancient culture of the people… They accepted Christianity,
no doubt, but not at the cost of total destruction of their ancestral values, which were
passed from generation to generation. It should be remembered that the culture and
traditions are rooted in the blood and heart of the people. No alien power or elements
can uproot the entire traditions and customs if they have real values. The Nagas’
ancient culture and social values were valuable. That is the reason behind the ancient
traditional wisdom and social practices including religious festival ceremonies
remaining as fresh today as it were in the beginning. It is heartening to note that, today, the Nagas as a whole are very much aware of their past cultural values. They are applying all the efforts to revive and preserve them. The Nagas are rich in their old cultural and social values, which are inter-related (Singh 2008).

1.2.7 Christianity in Manipur

The first missionary who came to Manipur was Rev. William Pettigrew. Pettigrew came to Imphal on 6 January 1894 and began to think that his missionary call must have been among the Hindu Meiteis of the Manipur valley. Thus he immediately started his proselytizing activities by opening schools. No sooner had he started his work when some orthodox Hindu Meitei leaders were suspicious of Pettigrew’s preaching. They felt it was a deliberate attempt to impose upon them (Meiteis) the ‘government’s (British) religion.’ Fearing that trouble might arise if William Pettigrew was allowed to continue his proselytizing work, the school was taken out of his hand and brought under the management of the state government. Propagation of Christianity among the Meiteis was also prohibited forthwith (Dena 2010). However, Pettigrew was permitted at his own risk to work among the Tangkhul Nagas in the hills, north east of Imphal. Pettigrew toured in the Tangkhul areas in 1895 and chose Ukhrul as the centre of his Mission centre (Sangma 1987).

With the advent of Christianity social transformation of the Tangkhul society took place in numerous ways. While several new things were introduced many indigenous social practices and aspects of culture were abolished. At the same time many modifications were made in the traditional social customs and practices. This kind of transformation gave birth to the much needed reformation of the Tangkhul
society (Ruivah 1993). He also discussed the factors that brought about a socio-cultural change among the Tangkhuls. To him the most important factor of social change among the Tangkhul was proselytization. Shimray, a local Tangkhul Naga historian (2001) made a comprehensive study on the history of the Nagas, their origin, migration, settlement and the changes taking place among them. Shimray (2005) in his other book deals with the advent of Christianity and its impact on the Nagas in general. When he talked about the impact of Christianity, he gave absolute credit to the Christian missionaries. Borgohain’s book, ‘Scrolls of Strife’ (2011), is an attempt to probe the tumultuous history of the Nagas. In this book, he mentioned the long-term impact of the British colonialists and American missionaries on the people. He said, “The Nagas had been living a relatively sheltered existence, not easily exposed to life-changing developments happening at the time in the rest of the world. Equally crucially, the Nagas did not have a written script, nor any institutionalized system of education. It was, therefore, highly fertile soil for the missionaries to plant their seeds of the Christian way of life.” He further said that, Christian missionaries established formal education for the local population all over India. Today it is widely recognized that some of the finest schools and colleges in the country are those built by the missionaries.

When they became ardent believers of Christianity, western influence crept into their culture to a great extent… The younger generation is totally unexposed to their rich tradition, culture and heritage and completely ignorant about their own folk literature. The dances, the songs and the festivals related to Tangkhul culture are slowly disappearing from the lives of Tangkhuls under the influence of Christianity
(Arokiyathan 1982). Horam a local Tangkhul Naga scholar (1977) highlights several significant aspects of their traditional social and cultural life as well as the recent changes in their norms and values, customs and practices, and myths and ballads. He found the new religion proved beneficial in countless ways such as removal of superstitions, introduction of schools and hospitals, cleanliness, and a turning away from head-hunting and such other practices. Yet the spread of Christianity has not always been an unmixed blessing. Das an anthropologist (1985) discusses the interaction between valley and hill people of Manipur. He showed that religion played a determining role in the assertion of tribal identity. He also agreed that Christianity is a major unifying factor in tribal life. There is no denying the fact that Christianity is in many ways responsible for improving tribal life, but on the other they fail to find suitable substitutes for the basic premises, values and goals of their traditional culture. This led to tribal nationalism based on traditionalism, which is synonymous with social freedom and political power. Shimray (2007:115-16) believed that there was a drastic shift in socio-cultural and economic system with the rapid growth of education and Christianity. Modern education improved livelihood, health status and Naga economy and brought about social change. At the same time, the new faith virtually wore the traditional foundation like dances, folk songs, games, customs, practices and folk-stories. Furthermore, Christianity re-modeled the Naga traditions like abolishing the practice of feast of merit, ceremonies and rituals. The feast of merit, disapproved by early missionaries in fact has important social and economic functions. It is a social reciprocation manifesting the attitude of generosity, compassion, social concern and responsibility. Such practice enhances social cohesiveness and communitarian
feelings. In this context, Shimray (2007) shared Verrier Elwin’s opinion that openly attacked the work of missionaries and argued that their teaching undermined traditional institutions. During the process of proselytization many Naga customs and culture were abandoned and destroyed beyond repair. Subsequently, many cultural practices became Christian taboos portrayed as ‘sin’. Drinking traditional Naga rice beer is banned among the Baptist cohorts. Many traditional festivals were discarded [giving priority to Christmas], folksongs and dances were gradually diminishing [taking over by hymn] and many traditional games vanished in the process. The circumstances created a ‘vacuum’ between the Naga traditions and the Christian faith. This has not been felt sufficiently by the missionaries and contemporary educated Nagas and could later threaten the Naga identity and social solidarity.

The above review of literature reveals that Christianity is an important aspect of the tribal societies of Northeast India. However, the extant literature seems to suffer from the following shortcomings. One, the impact of Christianity has been accepted as a given fact without explaining how exactly a change was due to Christianity and not due to other related factors like education, urbanization and modernization. Two, a number of authors may have been concerned with the factors responsible for conversion to Christianity of the Tangkhuls in particular and Naga tribes in general but they failed to pay attention to the processes of such conversion. Third, the impact of Christianity at the personal, societal and tribal levels has hitherto not been paid any or adequate attention by the previous authors on the Tangkhuls of Manipur.
1.3 Objectives

The main objectives of the present study are:

(i) To study the spread of Christianity among the Tangkhuls of Ukhrul town of Manipur, keeping in mind the town as a cultural space.

(ii) To examine the influence of Christianity on the life of the people of this tribe.
    - at the personal level
    - at the societal level and
    - at the tribe level

(iii) To understand the process of change that might have taken place among the Tangkhuls after becoming Christians.

1.4 Methodology

In the process of selecting the field, the choice fell on Ukhrul town for various reasons. First, Tangkhuls are predominantly settled in the Ukhrul town of Manipur. Second, this town is the centre of Tangkhul social, religious and political activities. And third, Christianity was first introduced among the Tangkhuls of this town. Hence the proposed town was ideal for carrying out the present study.

I started my study with a survey of the town, meeting the elders, pastors, leaders, intellectuals, etc. for preliminary information. After preliminary survey was made, detailed study was initiated. Data was collected on the basis of observation and interview with well-informed adult men and women from the twenty-five tangs or localities of the town. The interviews were both structured and unstructured.
Further this study was based on primary data collected from three generations of Christian converts. Inter-generational comparison was made to understand the impact of Christianity. For the same purpose, case studies of key informants were also collected. The present research also tried to reconstruct the pre-Christian social scenario on the basis of secondary sources as well as interviews with the old and knowledgeable informants to better understand the impact of Christianity amongst the Tangkhuls of this town.