CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Land and People

Manipur, an erstwhile princely state, is situated in the extreme corner of North-East Indian territory, bounded by Burma on the East, Nagaland on the North, and Tripura on the West. Manipur covers an area of 8,628 sq. miles, of which 700 sq. miles constitute the valley where the Meiteis live. The rest is the homeland of various hill-tribes. Since the advent of Hinduism, the Meiteis are claiming descent from Arjun, one of the Pandavas. In all certainty, before the coming of Christianity to the hills, and Hinduism to the plains, both the hill people and the Meiteis were animists. Pantheistic practices in the valley, for instance, are known severally as 'Imunglai,' 'Umanglai,' 'SanaMahi,' etc. Conversion to Hinduism in the valley took place in the 18th century, though Hindu influence started as early as the 15th century. To quote Hodson; Hinduism is of comparatively recent origin, though the records of the Brahmin families in Manipur, claim in some cases, that the founder of the family settled in the valley, at so remote a date as the middle of the 15th century. About three hundred years ago, the Meiteis had a religion and set of habits, customs and manners, the vestige of which is still to be found in the non-
Christian Naga villages today."¹

The state of Manipur is a place of antiquarian interest isolated from the neighbouring kingdoms by an encircling zone of mountains, Manipur maintained her independence for a long time. Within the area of the state, there is an immense variety of climate and scenery, which is only equalled by the variety of the types of mankind.² Dr. Brown says that, "Although the general facial characteristics of the Kunnipore are of the Mongolian type, there is a great diversity of feature among them, some of them showing a regularity approaching the Aryan type."³

The group name 'Meitei,' has been derived from mi- man, and thei- separate. From popular traditions, it is known that, Manipur was the home of many tribes, of which seven are of primary importance i.e. (1) The Mingthouja or Meitei, (2) The Angom, (3) The Khumal, (4) The Moirang, (5) The Luwang, (6) The Sarang-Leishangthem and (7) The Khaba-Nganba. Each of these tribes had its own independent principality, but in the struggle for supremacy amongst themselves, the Mingthoujas or the Meiteis emerged victorious.

¹ N. Horam (ed.), The Meiteis, p. viii.
annexed in course of time, the area of the other six clans, until all of the them came to be known by the common appellation of 'Meitei'. The Meiteis are concentrated for the most part in 1000 sq. miles of the Imphal Valley, whereas 7,000 sq. miles in Manipur is hill territory, inhabited by Naga and Kuki tribes. T.C. Hodson has divided the tribes in Manipur as being composed of (a) the Tangkhuls, who inhabit the hills immediately to the east and north of the valley of Manipur, (b) the Mao and Maram Nagas who inhabit the hills north of the valley, and (c) Quoirengs, Chirus, Marrings, smaller tribes varying from the slender, lightly built Marrings to the tall, sturdy, finely proportioned Maos. But like the Meiteis, the tribal population of Manipur, also possesses mongoloid features. The origin of the Manipuris is obscure. In the record of Manipur however, their history is traced from the 30th year of the Christian era, down to the year 1714, in which they number a succession of 47 kings. From 1714 onwards, the date of the accession of Raja Gharib Niwaz or Pam Haibaba, the people emerge from their mountain strongholds, they waged successful war in the fertile valley of the Irrawady,

attacked and reduced the most important Burmese towns and villages on the banks of the Mao, Chindwin, and Irrawady, and in the last, planted their stand in the capital itself. After him, the power of Manipur declined, and the first great invasion of the country by a Burmese army, known as 'Koolthakahalba,' or primary devastation occurred.

The invasion of Manipur by Alompra (1758 A.D.) must have been most disastrous to the inhabitants of the country, as they then, for the first time, sought external aid. A treaty of alliance, both offensive and defensive, was negotiated on the 14th September, 1762, between the British and the Manipuris. But the invasions of the Burmese continued. After the death of the Manipur Raja Jai Singh in October 1799, the history of Manipur presents an unvarying scene of disgusting treachery between the numerous sons of Jai Singh, who in their contest for supremacy, arrayed the unhappy people of the country, in hostile warfare against each other, and inflicted miseries upon them, little, if at all, inferior, to those they had suffered at the hands of their common enemies, the Burmese. Finally, in 1826, by the Treaty of Yandaboo, in February, Gambhir Singh was recognised as the Raja of Manipur. Just after the war, (Burmese), the

condition of Manipur was pathetic. The population of the Imphal Valley had dwindled down to 2,000 souls only.

Before 1891, there was not any remarkable social or religious reform movement in Manipur. Yet the acceleration of the process of Sanskritization of Manipur's society was noticed at this period. Charairongba was the first Manipur king to be initiated into Hinduism, his example was followed by his son Gharib Niwaz. Again, in the 19th century, Vaishnavism made more progress under the Manipuri kings like Gambhir Singh and Chandrakirti Singh. The process of sanskritization of Manipur had multi-faced expressions in the realm of political organisation, religious worship, social organisation and even in the historical and religious studies. After Hinduisation, all the Meiteis were classed as Kshatriyas; the Brahmins who were all Indian immigrants formed a group already. There were no other castes given to the Manipuris.¹

Britishers writing on the effect of Hinduism in the Meiteis have expressed diverse opinions. Col McCulloch, wrote in 1859, "their religious observances are only for appearance sake, not the prompting of the heart."² Hodson noted: "It is difficult to

¹ E.W. Dun, Gazetteer of Manipur, p.41.
² G.Kabui, Social and Religious Reform Movements in Manipur in the 19th and 20th centuries.
estimate the precise effect of Hinduism on the civilisation of the people, for to the outward observer, they seem to have adopted only the festivals, the outward ritual, the caste marks, and the exclusiveness of Hinduism, while all unmindful of its spirit and inward essentials."¹ What Lyall wrote represented a more accurate position: "The older religious ideas still survived beneath the surface of the philosophical system borrowed from India, and in reality sways to a large extent, the lives and sentiments of the people."² There was no organised social reform movement as such in Manipur in the 19th century, nor was there any influence of the Indian social and religious resurgence of the period on the Manipuri. It was due to lack of Western education among the Manipuris, and at the same time, there were very few social evils, in spite of the existence of the religious and social orthodoxy of the upper class Hindus, specially the Brahmins, patronised by the King and the common people. However, the absolutist rule of the monarchy, and its feudal social and economic system had their resultant evils. The British conquered Manipur in April, 1891, and

2. T. Hodson, The Naga Tribes of Manipur, p. 96.
the advent of Christianity in the state is a significant factor of the British rule in Manipur.

The Christian Mission in North-East India

Though North-East India came into contact with Christianity in the 17th century, through the Catholic missionaries search of a route to Tibet, real work began in the 19th century, when the British Baptists began work at Cherapunjee and at Gauhati. In 1836, the American Baptists established a centre at Sadiya in upper Assam. Meanwhile, the Welsh Methodists began work in the Khasi hills. Protestantism spread fast. The Garos (1863), the Aos (1871), the Angamis (1871), the Lothas (1895), the Tangkhuls (1895), received the Christian faith, brought by the American Baptists. The story of the Catholic Church in the region before 1890 makes fascinating reading. The contact was minimal and not much could be done. In 1889, with only six priests and seventeen brothers in the Apostolic Teaching Society, the founder, Fr. Frangiskus, Marie of the Cross Jordan applied to the Holy SEE for a foreign mission. The mission to Assam with two priests and two brothers was the society's first foreign mission. Chronologically speaking, the first Catholic Missions in the whole of north-east India of ecclesiastical jurisdiction

1. G.Kabui, op.cit.
were first Badarpur in Cachar district in 1890, second Shillong and Kaliang in the Jaintia Hills 1922, third, Gauhati 1923, fourth Jowai in the Jaintia Hills 1925, fifth, Cherapunjee and Dibrugarh 1931, sixth Tezpur in 1932. Fr. Leo Piasecki, a Polish, was in charge of the whole Brahmaputra Valley, plus the Garo Hills, from 1923 to 1931. He was stationed in Gauhati as the Rector of Don Bosco, and may be called the apostle of the tribals, of the Brahmaputra Valley; in particular for the labourers of the tea-gardens. With his good nature and simplicity, he won the friendship of the tea-planters, who liked him very much. He used their friendship intelligently, in favour of his Christians, getting the garden managers to build chapels, even some nice churches and schools, in the most important tea-gardens. Meanwhile, true to their fourth vow of the promise of the Apostolate, the Salvatorians did a tremendous job in the North-East, specially in the Garo Hills and the Assam Valley. Though they had to leave with the outbreak of World War I, they had laid the foundations for the later growth and development. For a short span of seven years, the Jesuits from Bengal, propped up

the young mission and did admirable work. The Catholic missionaries, both prior to, and after the first world war, had to face many odds; an immense region with mighty and capricious rivers, intractable forests, wild animals and a land populated by hundreds of tribal groups and adherents of ancient religions of India, and above all, the bitter and systematic opposition by Protestants, who considered north-east India, as if leased indefinitely to them, by the British overlords. A vitriolic campaign against Catholics by Welsh Methodists, who came to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, in 1841, was launched.

When the Salvatorians came to Shillong in 1890, there were a handful of European and non-local Catholics. In 1910, there were 1,000 Protestant schools in the Khasi Hills. But on the 3rd June, 1912, at the Coronation Darbar, a medal was awarded to the Prefect Apostolic, by the Governor of Assam. In 1915, there were 5,176 Catholics in ten mission centres scattered all over North-East India, served by five religious congregations, including the newly formed congregation of native sisters, 64 local catechists, a press, a local Khasi monthly 'Kaling Kristan,' and agricultural school, a

1. C. Becker, History of the Catholic Missions in North-East India, 1890 to 1915.
handicrafts school, and other schools. By the end of 1921, when the few Jesuit missionaries, 6,000 Catholics were about to leave Assam, there were about 6,000 Catholics. They were looked after by Fr. P. Lefebra and his Jesuit companions.

For centuries, Assam, viz, what we shall hereafter name as North-East India, was a mere missionary appendage to Lhasa, Agra, Pocca, Krishnagar, etc. Only in 1889, was North-East India entrusted to the Salvatorians for evangelisation. But the attempt was rendered abortive by World War I, and the discriminatory tactics of the British Government against the German Catholic missionaries. We must also keep in mind the theological presuppositions, and the missiological principles that conditioned evangelisation work and animated it, and gave it the peculiar stamp of the times. It was a theology that tended to be excessively other-worldly, at least in expression. It was a theology that did not have an adequate appreciation of the values, existing in non-evangelised and so-called primitive societies, though now we would readily admit, that some values of primitive societies, are far more to be esteemed than some of the negative values of more advanced societies. Again, in the theology

of the early decades of this century, had little appreci­ciation of ecumenical pursuits, ecumenically measured speech, and for local cultural values. The changed and enriched concept of evangelism today means, renewal of a society in Jesus Christ, it means bringing the Good News of total salvation, to every strata of a given society, and transforming it from within its individual and collective consciences and lives!

Fr. Paul Albera accepted the 'Assam' missions in 1921, as a command from the Holy Father (Pope). This triggered off the growth of Catholic missions in North-East India. With the advent of the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1922, led by the indomitable, Fr. Louis Mathias, rapid expansion work began, and the Church entered into hitherto unknown areas. Though World War II brought the work to a halt, it is admitted by all, that the most astounding expansion of the Church in North-East India took place during the post-war period. This was probably due to the increased availability of men and means. It was also due to the fact that the monopoly, that the Protestant churches had received under the British, was removed after Independence. The Church spread to both the banks of the Brahmaputra, entered Nagaland and Manipur, and touched new peaks of

1. Ibid, Salesian Contribution to Evangelisation in North-East India.
During this period! It was as the Bishop of Dibrugarh, that Fr. Marengo, a sanguine, affectionate, pioneering missionary made his historical entry into Nagaland and Manipur in 1953.

In a way, it was providential that the Salesian Society came forward to accept the mission of North-East India. It had already a well-established missionary tradition and experience, and a specific missionary approach. Besides, a large congregation like the Salesians, could put more personnel and resources into its evangelisation work than what the Salvatorians could have hoped to do, for many more decades.

Due to various reasons, such as poor means of communication, the North-East has always been an inaccessible region. Besides, the distance from any substantial Christian community, made it isolated. Since mission work was mainly done by foreign missionaries, and their number remained limited for a long time, Salesians were practically the only Catholic missionaries in most of the places of North-East India, except the Holy Cross Fathers who were working in Silchar.

Early 19th century Church was remarkably unmissionary. And then there occurred an outburst of new missionary enthusiasm, particularly in Italy and France. In Italy alone, there sprang up over three hundred religious congregations, and many of them were specifically or considerably missionary. Of these, the most phenomenal growth was experienced by the Salesians, founded by St. John Bosco, and the Salesian sisters started by him in conjunction with St. Mary Nazarello, and together these have grown to exceed 40,000 members, and have spread throughout the world.¹

The Salesian congregation was essentially, if not predominantly, a missionary congregation. Poor youth and the non-evangelised were two of Don Bosco's primary concerns. It is not commonly known that Don Bosco had a great love and a predeliction for India and Asia. His missionary dream of 1886, made India even more dear to him. He often exclaimed to his Salesians, 'What a marvellous day it will be when our missionaries will go to evangelise India.' During his own life-time, he started negotiations for the Vicariate of Mangalore, and a foundation in Calcutta.²

The early pioneers brought with them an extraordinary degree of enthusiasm, joy, and a sense of 'Mission' to their missions. The first Salesians in India, revealed an extraordinary capacity and readiness for untiring work, and dedication to the people along with a remarkable degree of resourcefulness. An example of one such was Fr. Michael Devalle, who having received permission for land in Garubandha village of Jakhalabandha for a Don Bosco institution, had his bamboo-thatched shed pulled down the evening of its erection, by a group of intoxicated people, and when the police filed a criminal case at Howgong court, Fr. Devalle who went for the identification parade fixed by the police, to trace out the culprits, generously pardoned the people, and withdrew the police case. Enervating and extenuating tours were uninterruptedly conducted by the two pioneer missionaries in the whole of Tezpur jurisdiction, i.e. Fr. Antony Alessi and Fr. Aloysius Avalaco. In 1936 came Fr. Michael Devalle, then Fr. Dionisius Troncana, followed by two missionaries from Spain, Frs. L.Ayuso and Cyprian Sancheq. They had to contend against many odds—tigers, elephants, leaches, termites, cobras, forests, torrents, hills and mountains, but despite all these hazards, they went forward to achieve their goal. After visiting a number of mission centres and communities, Bishop Willibald Menezes,
auxiliary of Bombay once remarked: 'In no part of India, have I seen mission communities and centres complete with a mission church, house, school and boarding for the poor boys, convent, school and boarding house for poor girls, so well built up, and in such a short time.' The Salesian pioneers also exhibited a remarkable sense of unity of life and purpose among themselves. From the very beginning of its presence in North-East India, the Church worked tirelessly for education, which was much lacking and sorely needed. In fact F.S. Downs remarks, that the key to Roman Catholic success, was its educational policy. The Protestants were very influential in the villages, because they had set up a whole network of schools, all over the Khasi Hills. They had the monopoly over the school system. Gradually, the Catholics too, established their own schools. For the Salvatorians, education had top priority. Besides, formal education, the Salvatorians established home science schools, an agricultural school and a handicrafts school. The Salesians too launched into educational work. The Salesian approach to youth, Salesian interest in technical schools, and a reputation in the field of education, were also major assets in the field of evangelisation. Two factors favoured inculturation
and adaption, at least, to some extent namely, formation in loco (local missionaries or indigenous missionaries), and the great love of the people shown by the missionaries. Since future missionaries spent over ten years in the missions constantly in contact with the people, it was easy for them to pick up the customs and languages of the people, to understand their psychology, their needs and aspirations in a non-formal way. In many cases the missionaries adapted themselves to the people and their mentality almost automatically. For many, the languages of the people became even more than a mother-tongue!

The deep concern of the Catholic missionaries for education was highly praiseworthy. The first Catholic school in Shillong was an answer to the abysmally low rate of literacy among the Khasis. The Catholic Church can take pride in the fact, that wherever she went, she undertook the task of education, long before, the political powers took an interest in it, and thus paved the way for an educational revolution in the North-East. The Catholic schools, with their higher standards, better trained personnel, were looked upon as the top-most centres of learning in the North-East. In fact, the first demand of the people of a new area from Catholic missionaries was for a school. The Church in the North-East is respected, tolerated and

wanted in the region, because of its schools. The role that education plays in the process of development is undeniable.

Through a large network of primary schools, practically in every remote village, the Salesians have contributed enormously to raising the level of literacy from 0% to 30% to 70%. They have also pioneered the beginnings of technical education in the whole of North-East India. The same must be said of high school and college education. A number of the political, educational and governmental leaders of the region, are products of their schools and colleges. Dr. Frederick Downes, a leading Protestant Church historian confirms this view: "Without question, the most important post-war development, was the rapid expansion of the Roman Catholic Church. At the beginning of the war, there were about 50,000 Catholics in the region, by 1977, there were 3,69,681. Now they began to expand throughout the region, the cutting edge of their new thrust being an ever-expanding net-work of educational institutions of high quality."²

2. S. Karotemprel, op. cit., p.16.
Pope Paul VI remarks: "What matters is to evangelise man's culture and cultures. Today, the Catholic missionaries, are asked to reach out to communities, in their collective religious, cultural and social dimensions. There is no Christian or Catholic culture so called. The missionary should have a good grasp of the cultural patterns of the people. Here, in the North-East, every tribe has its own feasts and social gatherings. The animistic rites at birth, christening, marriage, and death, are impressive, and can prudently be inserted into the Christian rites, enriching the universality of the Catholic Church with a freshness all its own. The tribals in the North-East are used to the type of government based on the village system, especially in the olden days, but even today to a great extent, each village is almost autonomous, with its own complete machinery for government. Though the Protestant churches adopted more easily to this type of functioning, the Catholic Church was slow! But education in Catholic schools today, can teach the youth well and effectively, so as to enable them to play their role as active and responsible citizens in the villages, state and country as a whole. And so Bishop Marengo of Dibrugarh had remarked of

Manipur; "That the first Catholic missionaries, worked tirelessly and strenuously, and their hard, devoted, self-sacrificing work bore fruit in the fact, that the boys who studied and grew under the loving care the Fathers in the Don Bosco Youth Centre of Chingmeirong, Imphal, are now in all parts of Manipur, and not a few of them are now holding important government jobs."  

MANIPUR - After the British conquest of Manipur in 1891, Churachand was selected as the future ruler of the state, but during the period of his minority (1891-1907), the British Government in India decided to administer the state, and for this purpose appointed Major Maxwell as Political Agent of Manipur, and Superintendent of the State. In consequence, changes took place, not only in the administrative set-up, but in other spheres as well. In his instructions to the English navigators, Edward VII, stressed that the service of Christianity must be the chief interest of such as should make a foreign discovery. The British Government in India actively encouraged Christian Prosleytism in the hill regions of North-East India, not however Catholicism. Among the Manipur hill tribes, the

1. Catholic Readings, Don Bosco, Imphal, 22nd September, 1985, vol.4, no.19
2. Lal Dena, Colonialism and the study of Christian Missions in North East India, Proceedings of the North-East India History Association, p.132.
Tangkhuls have the largest area and population, and they also lead in the number of educated men and women in the state. Nevertheless, benefits of civilisation were slow in coming. The pace of the change was slightly accelerated by the arrival of the Christian missionaries from the West. The Naga tribes encountering outside (British) government for the first time, were often unruly, as the norms and ways of the ruler and ruled did not coincide. Though the officers dealt firmly with the local customs, such as head-hunting, they were lenient in other matters. But not so the missionaries. They came with a zeal which they only were capable of, to bring spiritual enlightenment to the animistic hillmen. But here they would run into difficulties. First they would have to work out the bearing of Christianity on the sort of life that was lived in the Naga Hills. The first thing that strikes visitors about the Nagas, is their pride and grim loyalty to tradition. The missionaries had to contend with both, and work out a method, by which the old methods and customs could be adapted to suit the new faith they were offering.

Reverend William Pettigrew was the pioneer Christian missionary of the state. Even though Manipur was suggested for the Welsh Mission Field in 1840, it was not thought to be potential, because of the unsettled political condition. Pettigrew originally belonged to the Birmingham Mission of the Church of England. He joined the American Baptist Mission and did a remarkable job, not only as preacher, but also as an educationist and philologist. He was honoured both by the Government and learned bodies in India. He came into contact with the Manipuris in Cachar, and learnt their language. In fact he spent three years in Cachar (1890-1893), until he was able to come to Manipur, through the Political Agent Major Maxwell, and he arrived in Imphal on February 6th, 1892, 'to start a school,' which turned out to be only giving tuition to the children of some government officials.

A. Porteous, the acting Political Agent, had invited Rev. W. Pettigrew to open a school at Imphal, apparently without consulting higher authorities in Assam. Rev. Pettigrew commenced his operation in Imphal on 6th February, 1894, and began to think that his call was among the plains people (Meitheis), and was anxious to work among them. Not surprisingly, the

1. Lal Dena, op. cit., p. 133.
Vaishnavite, Hinduised Meitheis construed Pettigrew's teaching as a deliberate attempt to impose upon them the Government's religion (Christianity). Maxwell, the Political Agent, on his return from furlough, took an alarming view of the situation, and immediately wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Assam thus: "Bearing in mind the extreme care in which the Hanipuris (Meitheis) hold to the tenet of the Hindu religion, bordering in fact, almost to fanaticism, I can easily conceive the trouble which will arise as soon as we place the Saja (Churachand Singh) in charge of his state, on reaching manhood!" He therefore concluded, that to give licence to Rev. Pettigrew to preach among the Hindu Manipuris, would mean to wage war against the so-called state religion. Hodson had held the view that Manipuris religion was Hindu in form only. But Dr. Parrat writes: "If it is accepted that Hinduism, as any world religion, modifies itself in regions, then there can be no serious objection in describing Meitei religion as Hinduism. It is certain that the term 'animism'; however defined, describes neither the original religion of Manipur, nor its present brand of Hinduism. What we have in Manipur, is the synthesis of two faiths which has taken place gradually, over a fairly long period of time. Aspects of traditional

1. Lal Denia, op. cit., p.133.
religion have fallen away in the process, just as
certain aspects of classical Hinduism have never
gained full acceptance. The result is an amalgam, in
which the peculiar cultural and religious genius of
the Meiteis has helped to shape the kind of Vaishnav-
ism, which is now dominant. Hinduism in Manipur is
not a mere veneer as Hodson seems to suggest, it has
been fully integrated in Manipuri religion, as an
essential factor in the faith and life of the people.
The fusion of the two religious traditions has been
well summed up by S.K. Chatterjee: "Manipur religion,
Hinduism gradually became a synthesis of the old
Meitei religion with its gods and goddesses, myths,
its legends and tradition its social customs and
usages, its priests and ceremonials, the Brahmanical
Hinduism with its special worship of Radha and
Krishna. It is this synthesis which is today, the
religion of Manipur."

The peculiar position in which the British were
put to administer the state on behalf of the minor
Raja (Churachand), perhaps, made them hesitant to
interfere with the religion which occupied so much
of their (Meitheis) time and attention. The official
policy of the Government of India, was that officials
were not to undertake major reforms during the regency.

administration. Thus, in so far, as the Hindu Manipuris were concerned, the British officials decided to maintain the status quo. Rev. Pettigrew had written the first grammar and primer of the Manipuri language. He was however asked to desist from his missionary activities in Imphal, and if he wanted to continue to stay in Manipur, he should transfer his missionary activities to the hill people of Manipur. Maxwell again came to his rescue and suggested he should work in the North-East area at Ukhrul, among the Tangkhul Nagas, where the State Government granted him a plot of land for the mission work. He started a school in Ukhrul, and formulated the state's educational policy in the hills. However, as F.3. Downs says: "Despite the help of Major Maxwell, the early years at Ukhrul were difficult ones." 1

The Tangkhuls as a tribe, are proud of their heritage and conscious of their faults. Also, they have no false sense of modesty about their leading position among the Nagas in the field of education, and are acutely aware of the responsibility in Naga public and political affairs, which this achievement places on them. This awareness every Tangkhul possesses, and more so, if he has had the coveted opportunity of a formal higher education. 2

The foundation of the Baptist missionary movement was laid in 1907, the Church of Ukhrul was established with seven members. Early in 1901, twelve boys of Pettigrew's school were baptised. But the progress of Christianity before World War I was very slow.

The earliest missionaries were just not seeking adherents. In the Maga Hills, the missionaries perhaps preferring the quality to the quantity, applied uncompromising rigour towards the established religion animism. Now religion was intertwined with life at every step and stage, the elimination of old festivals, sacrifices and taboos, almost meant changing the whole manner of the Maga life. With drinking of alcohol being frowned upon, the very essence of the festivals had gone out. Life was no longer simple and pagan. Nevertheless, the new faith claimed many adherents. For, if it took away much that was familiar, it promised much more that was good, not only for their souls, but also for their bodies, whose needs were always more clamant. In the wake of the missionaries came medicine, touring dispensaries, education, and above all, love. Christianity has come to the Tangkhul Maga Hills less than a century ago, and today it claims 85% of the population. But the initial opposition to the new faith was formidable. The entire traditional Tangkhul society was pitted against the missionaries,

and very often the intrepid convert had to face not only the wrath of his family, but also of his fellow villagers. There are interesting stories about how the lycanthropists played their part in scaring the convert who was foolhardy enough to forsake the faith of his fathers', and who not only brings down upon himself, but also jeopardises the well-being of the entire community.

While Rev. Pettigrew concentrated his missionary activities among the Tangkhuls of North-East Manipur, another foreign Christian missionary, Mr. Watkins Roberts of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission of Aizal was invited by the chief of Senvon village of South-West Manipur Hills to do mission work. He came and founded the Indo-Burma, Thadou-Kuki pioneer mission. T. Luikham records that the south-west area, was originally a sphere taken up by Rev. Pettigrew, as he went to preach to Khongjang, Parbung, Lailong, Phergawl, etc. Later on the pioneer mission was split into two, Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, and North-East India General Mission (NEIGM) in 1928, and founded the Independent Church of India. Meanwhile the headquarters of the Baptist Mission was shifted in 1916 from Ukhral to Kangpokpi, and a church was

established in Keishamthang Naga village of Imphal, which was a remarkable achievement, in view of the attitude of the King and the Hindu elite of Imphal. From 1917 to 1928, all the churches were under the jurisdiction of Manipur Christian Association, which was replaced by the Manipur Baptist Convention in 1928. During this period, another missionary called Dr. Crozier, joined the Baptist Mission. Initially Pettigrew and Crozier went together, but later in differences cropped up between them. Crozier took interest in the Kuki churches, whereas, Pettigrew took greater interest in the Nagas.¹

During the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919), Christian mission work was suspended. Both Pettigrew and Crozier participated in the campaigns against the rebels. Pettigrew was awarded a Sheri-Hind silver medal for meritorious service. In the early 1920's especially in 1923, there was a revivalist upsurge among the Christian of Manipur, but the Zeliangeon Christians were not affected by this.² The Anals refused to participate in the Kuki Rebellion, and to give them protection from Kuki deprivations, they were kept in a camp at Chingmeirong, Imphal. It was at this camp that they first heard of a

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¹ G. Kabui, op.cit., pp. 15-16.
² Ibid, p. 17.
new religion called Christianity, and came into contact with western education! Most of the Anals are now Christians. The Manipur (Christian) Revival was denounced by Crozier as "THE SPASM OF 1923". But it made Christianity popular among the hill people, though the popularity was short-lived. The earlier Christians faced opposition from the believers of the older faith. The conflict between the pastors and the village priest was very serious in the 1920's. The clash was mainly due to the attacks of the Christian missionaries on the traditional tribal beliefs and ways of life. Naturally the traditionalists had to defend against this onslaught. But this new religion (Christianity), proved beneficial in countless ways, such as removal of superstitions, introduction of schools and hospitals, cleanliness, and a turning away from head-hunting and other such practices. Sir James Johnstone wrote: 'I strongly urged the advisability of establishing a regular system of education, including religious instruction, under a competent clergyman of the Church of England. I pointed out that the Nagas had no religion, that they were highly intelligent, and capable of receiving civilisation, that with it they

2. G. Kabui, op.cit., p.16.
would want a religion, and that we might just as well give them our own, and make them in that way a source of strength, by thus mutually attaching them to us." Rev. Pettigrew was considered to be part of the colonial establishment, in so far as he was acting both as a missionary, and officiating state officer, in all matters concerning the day to day administration of the hill areas.

CATHOLIC MISSION IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

In the year 1887, the Synod of Allahabad asked Rome (Vatican), for the creation of a Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, i.e. the province of Assam as under the British Commissioner, and inclusive of the principalities of Manipur and Bhutan. In 1881, out of Assam's total population of 4,881,426, only 351 were Catholics. On the 13th December, 1889, the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam was created by Rome, and was entrusted to the Society of the Divine Saviour, popularly known as the Salvatorians, who reached Assam in 1890. Then Assam was the whole North-East of 47,000 sq. miles. The first Prefect Apostolic of Assam was appointed in the person of Fr. Christopher Becker in 1906. Salvatorian Fathers worked laboriously in hills and plains from 1890.

1. Sir James Johnstone, Manipur and the Naga Hills, pp. 18, 43.
to 1915. They were interned in 1915, and left Assam due to the first World War. After twenty-five years of strenuous work, they could win 5,000 souls for Christ. The Salvatorian party consisting of two priests, a mission Superior, viz Fr. Otto Hopferm-Veihinger and Fr. Angelus Huenzlohe and two Brothers, Marianus Schum and Joseph Baschis, set sail from Italy in January 1890, and reached Shillong in February, after fortyseven days of arduous voyaging. There were then only twenty Catholics inclusive of children at Shillong, since the Bengali clerks here, were conversant with the English language, the missionaries naturally tried to first convert them, but in this, they were met with failure. They then determined to convert the local population of Khasis, and Fr. Otto utilised the already published works of the Methodist Calvinist missionaries, who had preceded the Catholic missionaries by five decades. Fr. Otto worked zealously, but death took him away in August 1890. He had however prepared the way for the subsequent conversion of the Khasis to the Catholic faith. Bro. Marianus also succumbed to the ravages of dysentery in the same month, and Fr. Angelus had now to head the mission. Because of the paucity of helpers, regular mission work could only be undertaken after Fr. Gallus Schob took up residence in Gaubati. A small residence and church was built, but after Fr. Angelus returned to Europe in 1907, his

1. C. Becker, op. cit.
successor, Fr. Rudolph Fontaine, decided to concentrate his missionary activities primarily among the local people, with the assistance of the Christian element among the tea-garden labour force of Assam, especially those coming from Chotta Nagpur. (These people were already Christians). In fact, because of the dearth of Catholic priests, these Christian labourers of the gardens, had baptised their children in Anglican or German Lutheran churches. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the number of Catholics gradually rose from 422 to 809, and there were 350 catechumens still waiting for the arrival of the Catholic missionary, in order to be baptised. At this juncture, opposition was launched by both European Catholics and non-Catholics. The reasons are not difficult to seek. They regarded the natives as their social inferiors. Moreover, the European non-Catholics felt that since Catholic priests were following on the heels of the Protestant pastors, their teachings were making confusion more confounded, in that, the native population converted to Christianity still did not fully comprehend the tenets of the Protestant faith, and the Catholic missionaries were now super-imposing their own religious beliefs on the local people already converted to Protestantism. But the main fear of the Europeans was not the religious
certainities or doubts of the native Christian population, they were afraid that the Catholic missionaries would disrupt and cause to melt away their work force in the gardens, through their correction of moral evils, e.g. polygamy, or they might settle the local Catholics in Christian villages, in order to provide them with the necessary pastoral care. But when their fears did not materialise, the Europeans changed their attitude, and by 1908, agreed to construct chapels and quarters for catechists in five different tea-gardens. Enlightened planters came to the realisation that to keep the workers happy, they must also satisfy their religious needs. Support came to the Catholic missionaries from an unexpected quarter. The Government insisted on elementary schools being opened for coolies children, and the planters approached the Catholic catechists who were appointed as school teachers. In consequence, there was a significant increase in Catholic influence, and the planters appreciated the education afforded by the missionaries, as it resulted in an increase of order and discipline among the tea-garden workers. They responded by offering in turn, transport and housing facilities to the missionaries visiting their flock in the gardens, and according them, warm, generous hospitality.

In 1908, the necessity was felt for the opening of a new mission centre, and it was established in Dibrugarh in Upper Assam, Gauhati remaining the centre of Lower Assam. In 1913, the first Catholic convent was opened in Gauhati, and in the Surma Valley, at Bongashill, the Catholic missionary raised the standard of living of the people. By 1914, the number of Catholics in Assam had risen to 2,086.

In Manipur, after the events of 1891 (the year of the Anglo-Manipuri War), the British nominated Churachand to be the new Raja of the state, and he was coronated in 1908. Education in the state was under the supervision of the British. In the year 1912, the first Catholic missionary, Fr. Anogar Koenigsbauer came to Manipur. He was well received by the Raja and was even granted permission to open a mission house at Imphal, but due to the limited resources of the Assam mission (both man-power and finances), was unable to commence the evangelisation of Manipur. It seems, that the first Catholic Salesian missionary also set foot in Manipur in the same year, viz, Fr. Leo Piasecki. He habitually visited the Irish Catholic family of Dr. Mchiver, medical officer of Imphal. But it was many years later, in 1953, that the pioneer Italian

1. Ibid, p. 134.
Missionary, Fr. Aloysius Ravalico entered Manipur, and began the true missionary work in the state.

Although in 1948, the Maharaja of Manipur, had granted a permit for the Catholic missionaries to work in the hills of the domain, but since then, Maharajas in India had practically been deprived of all executive power, which for Manipur had been invested in the Chief Commissioner. In the early 50's, the Chief Commissioner of Manipur was Mr. Moon. He was an Ulster man, with no hereditary sympathy for the Catholics. During the British regime in India, he had been working in the police department, and had once refused to carry out the mandate to arrest Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru. After becoming the first Prime Minister of India, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru did not forget this act of friendship on his behalf by Mr. Moon, and promoted him to some important office in Independent India. He was now the big boss in Manipur, when a delegation of Tangkhul Nagas came for the installation of Bishop Marengo as Bishop of Dibrugarh on the 16th May, 1952 at Dibrugarh. During his (Bishop Marengo's) stay in Italy, he had the honour of a short audience with Pope Pius XII, to whom was mentioned the hopes as also the difficulties with regard to the evangelisation of Nagaland and Manipur. The Holy Father however answered: "Go, and do not fear, the road to Nagaland
and Manipur will open out. "At the Bishop's reception at Dibrugarh, there were present two delegations of Nagas, one of the Tangkhul Nagas of Hundung Village, Manipur, and the other of Lotha Nagas from Nagaland. As Bishop of Dibrugarh, Bishop Marengo had charge of both Manipur and Nagaland, which both formed part of the Catholic Diocese of Dibrugarh, and they only became autonomous dioceses many years later. (Manipur became a separate Diocese in April, 1980, with R. Rev. Joseph Mittathany, as its first Bishop.)

Bishop Marengo had a short epistulary squabble with Mr. Moon, Chief Commissioner, Manipur, when he wrote that he could not allow the Catholic Fathers to go to Ukhrul and visit the Tangkhul area. Fr. Bianchi Mario, the secretary of Bishop Ferrando of Shillong, then sent a copy of a permit by the Governor of Assam to visit Manipur, to Bishop Marengo. He in turn, forwarded the facsimilie of it to Mr. Moon. But Mr. Moon's contention was that such a permit did not automatically entitle the Catholic missionaries to go just anywhere in Manipur. To visit the hills of Manipur required a permit from the Chief Commissioner, and he held out that such a permit would never be granted. Mr. Moon probably was a good and just

1. O. Marengo, Memoirs, pp. 55-56
administrator, but it seemed that the easy-going Manipuris found him too strict and so he was removed. The S.D.O. (sub-divisonal officer) of Ukhrul was Mr. Thiankam, brought up at the school of Mr. Moon, but it was easier to influence him and gain his support for the entry of Catholic missionaries into the hill area of Manipur, especially as the Governor of Shillong was a friend of the Bishop and an admirer of the Catholic Church. Mr. Thiankam later became a very good friend to the Catholic missionaries, who reciprocated in kind, by bringing assistance to him, in getting his wife admitted and looked after by the Catholic sisters in the hospital at Dibrugarh.

Fr. Ravalico made his first trip to Manipur and the Tangkhul area towards the end of 1952, when he received into the church a good number of Naga catechumens from the village of Hundung. Dominic Shomi, the son of the Hundung headman had been studying for a few years at the Don Bosco Catholic school in Shillong. He had been baptised there and had been instrumental in making the Catholic Church known among his people, and in preparing the first Catholics. Unhappily, the Pioneer Catholic missionaries lost his support and good work all too soon. A political enemy

1. O. Marengo, Memoirs, pp. 55-56.
a non-Catholic, envious of his popularity and success, shot him dead. He had rendered invaluable assistance to Bishop Marengo in preparing the First Prayer and Hymn Book in the Tangkhul-language, and 'making of his big village a model Catholic community,' only a very few years following the arrival of the Catholic missionaries in the hills of Manipur. In 1953, Fr. Raivalico left on a very long, begging tour in U.S.A. and Italy. The Catholic Mission was undoubtedly in dire straits for money, 'but we were even more hard up for personnel,' and for the next two years, Bishop Marengo, to his great joy personally took charge of Manipur and the Lotha area in Nagaland, with the able assistance of Fr. P. Binachi in Manipur, and Fr. Larrea in Nagaland. 1

1. Ibid, p. 57.