CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

The traditional religion of the Lothas which has been termed as ‘animism’ has been supplanted by Christianity from the last decade of the 19th century. Today, the Lothas are predominantly Christians. The Christian population of the District account for about 95 percent, out of which 85 percent are Baptists. As per the census of 2010 of the Kyong Baptist Ekhumkho Sanrhyutsu KBES (The Lotha Baptist Churches Association), the Lotha Baptist Association has 121 affiliated Churches with total Baptized members of about 59,856. Besides the Baptists there are also Christians of other denominations who had established Churches and Schools in the Lotha area. Nevertheless, for more than half a century, the Baptist community remained as one body. It was during this period, from the 1880s to the early 1950s that the American Baptist missionaries, along with the new faith brought education, thereby bringing about revolutionary transformation and a new awakening. As the American Baptist Missionaries were the pioneers of the Christian Mission and modern Education in the area, the bulk of the present chapter deals with the ecclesiastical history of the Baptist Mission and the Baptist Churches during the period 1880 to 1950 which T. Kikon calls “the Age of Awakening” (1993:09) of the Lothas.

EARLY MISSION TO THE NAGA HILLS

Christianity was introduced to the Nagas in the latter half of the 19th century by the American Baptist Foreign Missionary Society. From the year 1813, American missionaries started coming to India. The removal of the ban on Missionary activity by the inclusion of the
clause in the Charter of the East India Company in that year encouraged American missionary activity in India. But it was not until the British annexation of Assam under the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 that Christianity was allowed to penetrate among the native people. By 1830 onwards a greater flow of American missionaries to India began. It was during the same decade that the attention of the American Baptist Foreign Missionary union was directed toward the hill tribes of Assam.

At the close of the Burman war in 1826 Assam was a part of the British dominion. In fact, the idea of mission in Assam was developed not by a missionary but by a political officer. Captain Francis Jenkins, the then Commissioner General of Assam was interested in establishing mission among the people of Assam. He found that the Kamptis at Sadiya were not only a nuisance, but treacherous, tricky and Demon worshippers. (Philips, 1972:50). He wrote to the American mission at Moulmein (Burma) for sending missionaries to work for the regeneration of the Hill tribes. (Pathak, 1967:40). The Baptist Foreign Missionary union gladly accepted the invitation and sent the Rev. Oliver T. Cutter as the first missionary to Assam in 1835. On their arrival in Sadiya, Assam on the 23rd of March 1836, Rev. Cutter and his family were cordially received by Captain Jenkins.

The American Baptist mission in Assam expanded gradually. In the 1840s stations were opened at Sibsagar, Nowgong and Gauhati in Assam. At Sibsagar station Dr. Edward Winter Clark arrived on 30th March 1869, entrusted by the American Baptist missionary union to look after the work of the printing press in Sibsagar, Assam. While in Sibsagar, Dr. Clark became acquainted with some Nagas who came to the Sibsagar Bazaar for trade and developed his vision to evangelize the Nagas. He was in fact, from the very first strongly drawn to them. (Sword, 1992: 106). Mrs M. M. Clark wrote; “A Man from Merangkong, a village in the Ao Naga tribe, while living in Sibsagar was baptized in 1851 by Rev. S. M Whiting. This man while on a visit to his native village was killed in a hostile attack. This was
all that was done toward giving the gospel to the Nagas previous to the undertaking of Mr Clark.” (1907: 05).

Attempt to evangelize the Nagas was also made in Namsang village, (Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh and now Tuensang District of Nagaland together comprised the NEFA. In 1957, Tuensang district was separated from NEFA to join the Naga Hills Tuensang Area.), by Miles Bronson when he toured the foothills during 1838 to 1840. Miles Bronson established a Christian Mission Centre at Namsang village in 1839. He built a house at Namsang village and arrived with his wife and sister, Rhoda Bronson on March 14, 1840. They opened a primary school, during which Bronson prepared a spelling book for the Singphos and Nagas. He also prepared a catechism in Naga language called ‘Natahema Heran Kabana Nyapran’ which is the first book to be written in a Naga language. (NBCC Platinum jubilee,2012:12 ). However Bronson’s family was obliged to return to Jaipur due to health reasons after eight months of stay without converting anyone.

Though the Naga mission was abandoned they succeeded in making some contact with the Namsangias who came down to the plains of Assam for trade purposes and a few Nagas were converted from time to time. The first Naga convert was Baptized on 12th September 1847 by Nathan Brown at Sibsagar. He was Hube but he died on 10th October 1847. (Sangma, 1987:268). The second Naga to receive Christ was Longjang Lepzuk, an Ao Naga from Merangkong Village. (Philips, 1976:53). He was baptized by the Rev. S. W. Whiting on September 7, 1851. He became a member of the Sibsagar Church. But when he went to his village intending to bring a wife, his village was attacked by a neighboring Naga tribe and he was killed. The third Naga to receive baptism was Yahukonsi Sarah Caldwell. Baptized on January 4, 1852 she became a member of the Nowgong Church. The Namsang Naga Mission was abandoned for about thirty years, from 1840 to 1870, until Rev. E. W.
Clark came to Sibsagar in 1869, and restarted the Naga Mission from another Naga region called Dekha Haimong (Molungyimsen).

The pioneer missionaries had to couple zeal with an adventurous spirit during the early days in Assam. Many hardships were encountered by them because of the resistance and hostility of the native people. A case in point was the incident of January 28, 1839, when the kamptis attacked Sadiya. Colonel White and eighty others were brutally slain in the assault. (Philip, 1972:50). In 1855, when two Konyak men, namely Aklong Konyak and Amlai Konyak of Namsang baptized by Dr. Brown at Sibsagar returned to their village preaching the gospel of God, the leaders of the village fearing that the new religion would create confusion in the minds of the people and turn the village ‘upside down’, and for the sake of ‘Peace and order’ in the village they were exterminated. (Philip,1972:50). Head hunting as a part of Naga culture was rampant among the Naga tribes and the villages then. The land of the Nagas was inaccessible not only due to geographical difficulties but also due to the risk of losing one’s head literally, if one go up to the hills. Thus the mission work among the Nagas did not progress much till 1871.

DR. CLARK’S MISSION 1872

Dr. Edward Winter Clark, the first American Baptist missionary to the Naga Hills arrived in Sibsagar, Assam on 30th march 1869. Initially he was entrusted to look after the work of the printing press in Sibsagar by the American Baptist missionary union. Here, Clark came to know of Naga traders who walked down to the Assam Plains with baskets of goods for trade. Clark was curious and interested in these tribesmen with Mongolian features and developed his vision to evangelize the Nagas. Among the Naga barter traders was Subongmeren, an Ao Naga from the village of Dekahaimong (Molungyimsen) who was
approached by an Assamese evangelist by the name of Godhula Rufus Brown. Subongmeren lived with Godhula and his wife Lucy from December 1870 till 1871. He was baptized in early 1871 by Dr. Clark at Sibsagar. He became the first contact person who paved the way for further evangelization of the Nagas. (Philips, 1972 :53).

The Assamese evangelist Godhula Rufus Brown, willing to risk his life volunteered to make the first venture into the Naga area, entered Dekahaimong (Molungyimsen) in the Ao area in October 1871 but the villagers were not happy. He was suspected of being a British Spy. The village council discussed what should be done with him and they decided to ‘send him off’, ‘get him out of the way’, a spy, doubtless of the company. (Clark, 1907 :11). Clark too was suspected of being an agent of the company. It took some time for the people to understand the real motive of the missionaries in Nagaland. This was another obstacle the early missionaries faced. Nevertheless, Godhula’s venture did not go in vain and in November 1872, he returned from Dekahaimong (Molungyimsen) bringing with him the nine Nagas who were willing to embrace the new religion of love and peace, the first fruits of his faithful labor. These nine Nagas were baptized by Clark on November 11, 1872, and they were made members of the Sibsagar church. Braving the odds Clark himself arrived in Molung Yimsen, near Dekahaimong with the help of Godhula and Supongmeren. On December 18, 1872, 15 more Nagas were converted. On December 23, 1872, these converts along with nine baptized at Sibsagar were organized into a Branch church. Thus it became the first Naga Church. (Sangma, Vol-1, 1987:224). Dr. Clark established himself as the first missionary to the Naga Hills and served the Nagas for forty years between 1872 and 1911. Thus the first church in the Naga soil was planted. (Murty; 1976:11). This mission station was later shifted to Impur in 1894 which remains the mission centre for the Aos till date.
Dr. Clark also arranged to reach the other tribes from Impur. The decade 1887 to 1896 saw the humble beginning of evangelism and the growth of Church membership in the Naga hills. In addition to the Missionary activities of Dr. Clark at Molung in the Ao field, other missionaries were appointed to the other Naga tribes. On the initiative of Clark, in 1878, the American Overseas Missionary Board at Boston appointed Rev. C.D King to reinforce Dr. Clark in the Naga Hills. He established a mission centre at Kohima in 1880. Similarly, in early 1885, the Government granted permission to the American Mission to open another centre at Wokha, a British post almost equi-distant from both Kohima and Mokokchung. (Sema, 1992:72).

From their early observation of the Naga society, the British had realized the importance of propagating Christianity amongst the Naga tribes. Theological inspiration may not be the only explanation or motive of the missionary movement. Nevertheless, it is not the intention here or within the scope of the study to go in detail into the motivations that brought the American Baptist missionaries to come to these distant, unknown areas. Suffice it to say that they came with ample zeal, a singular direction of purpose, unflinching faith in the cause and relentless pursuance that attended the work of these early missionaries.

THE LOTHA MISSION

In retrospect, the arrival of the first missionary to the Lotha area in 1885 was truly a red letter day in the annals of Lotha history. The Lothas maintained their unique culture and religion for centuries despite the peripheral contact with the Hindus and Muslims of the plains of Assam to the west, with whom they traded. The retention of their culture and religion through centuries can be attributed to the mountainous features and practice of head hunting. Besides, the strong will of the people, their pride in their culture and their devotion and faith
in their religion were also undoubtedly major factors in the retention. The initial response to
the new faith, was therefore, largely unreceptive.

The missionary occupation of Wokha, the third centre in Naga hills was possible with
the initiation of Dr. Clark, who, during his ten months stay at Molungyimsen in 1876
exclaimed; “were the tidings of the Gospel of the prince of peace for the Aos alone? The spirit
which said, ‘go ye into all the world’ did not allow his eyes to remain fixed upon his own
field, they fell upon another people just as rude and savage”. He added, “A road is being made
from the plains of Assam to Wokha. The political agent will probably occupy Wokha another
year, when it will doubtless be safe place to live. Its height and location should give it a fine
climate. Wokha is a large Naga village and other large villages are near. Let the other
missionary family go there”. (Jubilee Conference, 1992: 89). As Dr. Clark predicted, an
English political control was extended and a political agent Captain Butler was appointed. It
was unfortunate that the brave captain fell victim to the ‘hostile and warlike spirit of these
people’ as Dr. Witter later wrote, “his successor was at once appointed and a sub- divisional
officer with a native military force was in command making Wokha a comparatively safe

W.E. Witter and Mr. H.P. Moore knowing the importance of occupying Wokha station
at an early date visited Molung and discussed the matter with Dr. Clark and Mr. Rivenburg. In
the meeting Clark said, “If the Witters will occupy Wokha at once, I will give the missionary
union a special gift of Rupees 500 to solve the expense of their transfer, and I feel thoroughly
convinced that such an act will meet the hearty consent of the brethren at Boston”. (Jubilee
conference report 1992:90). Accordingly, a telegram was sent to the Deputy Commissioner at
Kohima requesting permission to occupy Wokha. Having received a favorable reply,
preparation was made to transfer Dr. Witter to Wokha from Sibsagar. The journey to Wokha
commenced on March 31, 1885. They reached Wokha tea garden on April 7, where they were
met by C.D King of Kohima with many sepoys and hundred Naga coolies to escort the Witters to the new mission stations. (Philips 1972: 100). Dr Witter and his wife arrived at Wokha on the morning of April 9, 1885. With the arrival of Witter and his wife, the process of evangelization among the Lothas began.

WITTER’S CONTRIBUTIONS

To Rev. W.E Witter and his wife goes the credit for many ‘firsts’ in the Lotha land. A missionary couple with a clear sense of direction, they could sense the suspicion and distrust of the local people but gradually through demonstrated love, they found the way to the hearts of the Lotha villagers. With zeal and dedication, Witter began the preparation of a script for the Lotha language which, hitherto, no attempt had been made by any European to speak or reduce it to writing. The Roman alphabet was adopted, giving it a phonetic structure by re-assigning the sounds represented by various letters. A new script was thus born by the labors of the Rev. Dr. Witter, assisted by his wife, to a language which, hitherto was only spoken. Thus, slowly, new windows to the vistas of knowledge in the world around were opened to the Lothas. This landmark in the beginning of the Lotha literature had an unprecedented impact on the future of the Lothas. Thus Dr. Witter can be rightly called the father of Lotha literature and education.

The period of initial expansion of American missions in the Naga Hills was marked by important pioneering works on their part in several directions. In the beginning, their various activities supplemented each other. To proceed with their activities of evangelization, it was also necessary to spread education so that the Bible could be read and understood. The translation of the Bible to the language of the local tribes was also essential. As a result the missionaries were not only preachers and translators, but also educators and publishers.
Significant contributions were made in these areas among the Lothas by Dr. Witter. In 1885, at Wokha Village, Dr. Witter and his wife started a school, heralding the beginning of education and educational institutions in the Lotha area. They bought a land by 50 Paise from Wokha village and constructed a small house for school. That was the first school in the Lotha area. (Ngullie. 1994:110.) On 2nd August 1885, Mrs Witter gathered several boys and began the first formal teaching of Christian truth to the Lotha Nagas. (Jubilee conference report, 1992:91).

In addition to the study of the Lotha language, Dr. Witter devoted some time to the further pursuit of the Assamese, and which was an indispensable medium of communication to spread the gospel. A Sunday school class for sepoys and bazaar children, who were of mixed races, but all understood Assamese was also started by February 1886. The Assamese preacher H. Daniel Baruah perhaps helped Dr and Mrs. Witter at Wokha, as Baruah wrote in his letter to America in 1887 thus, “I am trying to do what I can to bring the gospel of our blessed Lord to the Lotha Nagas. I hope you will pray for Mr Witter and myself, and also for boys in our school, as well as for all these people. None of them has as yet received Christ as their savior”. (Murry (ed), 1979: 17). A day school was opened on August 25, 1886, with three Lotha boys who were employed as servants by the Witters. The number subsequently increased to seven. In the daily session of one hour to one and a half hour, the boys were given Bible instruction as also they were taught to read and write their own language, the Roman character having been adopted. The first catechism in Assamese, with the exception of the Lord’s Prayer was translated into Lotha language. Witter also prepared a first primer. In the school, Witter himself taught the boys. He reported in 1887, “I taught the school myself, and in the two months that the school was kept, the catechism was committed to memory, the primer mastered, and unfeigned joy in the work included”. (Murry (ed), 1979:18).
A considerable vocabulary was collected for a phrase book and samples of it were sent to Shillong to be examined by government officials. Upon examination they expressed their approval of the work and their willingness to publish the same at government expense. However, due to health problems, the Witters left for Kohima in May 1887, and remained with the Rivenburgs for almost a year. Nevertheless their work continued and just two days before they sailed for America in March 1888, an outline grammar book of the Lotha Language with a vocabulary appeared in print, published by the government of India. (Clark, 1907: 154). The Outline Grammar, was for many years the only attempt to reduce the language to writing and which constituted for a long time the sum total of Lotha literature. (Sword, 1992: 114). Mrs. Witter translated the Assamese catechism into Lotha and also the first hymn, “Jihova emong nchuk”, in the tune of ‘there is a happy land’. (Okotso Baptist Church Motsu, 2004:97). A portion of the New Testament was also translated by Mrs. Witter but could not publish it.

The school work was not very encouraging in the beginning, as Witter wrote, “To get these savages to attend school, we must at least give them their rice; for the parents have as yet no desire that their children be taught to read and write, and would as soon throw their rice in the fire as to send it to the station for the support of a boy in the school”. (Murry (ed), 1979: 19). The school closed soon with only those in attendance who were employed as servants. Witter also reported of the reluctance by the parents to send their children to the school because of their religious scruples. Children who ran away to be present in the school were punished by detaining them at home. Some were forbidden to pray aloud in their homes.

Proselytization too made a slow start. Witter himself said, “No conversion or baptism of any Lotha is found”. (Lotha Baptist Churches Association Golden Jubilee Souvenir. 1973:1). Daniel Baruah wrote in his letter to America in 1887, “None of them has as yet received Christ as their savior” (Murry, (ed) 1979:17). Nevertheless the groundwork has been
done. In 1888, Dr. Witter and his wife left for America to seek medical treatment and they did not return to the mission field at Wokha. Dr. Witter came back in 1922 with a medical degree, but worked in Gauhati till 1923. He returned to America and served as pastor in Lake Avenue Church, Rochester till his death in November 1931. (Lotha Churches Association History, 1998:9).

NON- RESIDENT MISSIONARIES

After the departure of the Witters in 1888, the annual missionary report on the Lothas remained blank for ten years. During that period even the school works came to a standstill. Dr. Clark reported, ‘as there was no missionary at Wokha during 1889-1893, the schools were not continued’. (Murry, (ed) 1979:20) Dr. Clark continuously requested the home board to provide a missionary for the Lotha tribe. Non- resident missionaries from Impur and Kohima were arranged to meet the urgent needs of the Lothas.

Rev. F.A Haggard was designated to take charge of the Lotha area along with the work at Impur between October 27, 1896 and December 31, 1897. He began the study of the Lotha language using the Grammar prepared by Dr. Witter. But he was transferred to Impur because of financial position. Other non- resident missionaries were entrusted from time to time to look after the Wokha mission. In 1900, Rev. S. W. Rivenburg took charge of the Lotha work in addition to the Kohima field. Rev. W.F. Dowd, from Impur took additional charge of the Lothas in 1902. Rev. S.A. Perrine worked on the Lotha from Gauhati till 1904. (Murry, 1976:33).

It was not until the arrival of Dr. Bailey that a permanent mission centre was established in the Lotha area. He secured permission to purchase land in Wokha from the
SDO of Mokokchung and purchased the present Vankhosung Mission Compound. Howard and Harriet Houston fondly remembered him as they recalled, “Dr. Bailey bargained with the shrewed Wokha villagers for a piece of land beyond the village known as Vankhosung and bought thirty two (32) acres which became the Vankhosung mission compound. On top of the hill Dr. Bailey planned to build their home, and he made the rock retaining walls for the foundation around which he planted small cedar trees. But in a short time, he died of typhoid fever contracted from drinking tea into which unboiled water had been poured. Today the cedar trees are lovely and tall, shading the ball field where the Bible school students play”. (1987:05). In memory of the works he had done for the Lothas, when the Wokha Town Baptist Church (WTBC) sponsored college was established in 2006 at Wokha, it was christened in his name.

Besides the above mentioned missionaries, there were other non-resident missionaries who worked for the evangelization of the Lothas. Rev and Mrs R.P.Longwell stayed in Impur and looked after the Lothas from 1920-1926. All the annual reports on the Lothas were given by him from Impur. The first report of Rev. J.E Tanquist on the Lothas is seen in 1937 and the last report in 1947. During his time Lotha literature was improved and the New Testament was released in 1943. Rev B.I. Anderson reported on the Lotha work in 1941. He took charge of the Lotha work in the absence of Rev Tanquist. He built the Bible school building in the upper Vankhosung. During his time the translation of the New Testament started. (Lotha churches Association history, 1998:21). Stationed at Kohima, G.W.Suplee looked after the Lothas from 1935-36. The Houstons were the last missionaries who lived with the Lothas during 1948-1953.

The contribution of these non-resident missionaries to the Lothas is summed up by the Howard and Harriet Houston in the following words, “The first school in the Lotha
country was built by Bengt Anderson at Vankhosung. Although Bengt was a Sema Naga missionary and lived in Impur, he was in charge of the Lotha work for a time. Then Mr. Tanquist helped the Lothas from Kohima in addition to his work with the Angamis and other tribes. Both Mr. Anderson and Dr. Tanquist arranged for the printing of small school books and Bible stories, and in the early days of World war two, Mr. Tanquist supervised the printing of the first edition of the Lotha New Testament. Others, too, had helped the Lothas. Mr. Longwell had opened a school for Lotha boys on the plains. There was a time during World war two when Mr. Supplee of Kohima was in-charge of all the Naga work. Through the years the Supplees trained many Lotha boys in the mission school in Kohima”. (1987:5)

These non-resident missionaries were helped by local Christians in their work of the translation of the Bible into the Lotha Language. With the help of N. L. Kinghen, Ashio Ovung, Chumdemo Murry, Shanjamo jungi, and others, by 1940, the gospel of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John were translated for the Lothas. The Rev. Bengt Anderson wrote in 1937, “At the time of one of my visits to Impur during the year, I discovered a manuscript of the Gospel of Mark, translated by Chumdemo into the Lotha Language. I packed this bundle of handwritten sheets with my luggage and took it to Kohima. On my visits to Wokha I read it and revised it with Chumdemo’s help and typed it hoping to have it printed. But the strict rule laid down by the Bible Society prohibited first term missionaries from getting any translations printed. In my determination to get it into the hands of the people I printed fifty copies on an old discarded duplicator. The Lotha workers received this first portion with great enthusiasm”. (2008:08). Later, it was published by the Bible society under the supervision of Rev. J. E. Tanquist. He was helped by Ashio Ovung in the translation of other portions of the Bible. In 1946, the first edition of the New Testament was completed by Rev. Anderson and Rev. Tanquist with the help of Ashio Ovung. The translation of the Old Testament was also started by Tssidenshio Tsanglao, which was later completed by Rev. Ellis Murry with the help
Although the Lothas were helped from the beginning by the non-resident missionaries, they always felt like step children. They constantly prayed and requested for a missionary family who would come and reside among them. After twenty-five long years of praying, and never giving up hope, the Rev and Mrs Houston arrived. Before he was called to missionary service Howard worked as Assistant pastor at Oregon. Approached by Dr. Osgood of Bengal and Orissa, to mission service, the Houstons gladly accepted. They were officially welcomed at the silver jubilee anniversary of the Lotha Baptist Association in January 1948 at Vankhosung, ‘dressed in Lotha clothes and made Lothas’. (Lotha Baptist Church History: 9)

Rev and Mrs. Houston, during their short stay in Vankhosung from 1948-1953, contributed much for the upliftment of the Lothas. Besides their work of evangelism and educating the people, the missionaries trained them in personal hygiene and provided medical care. They wrote in 1948, “Although we told the Lothas we were not medical people, still they come to us for help. Everyday Harriet had a ‘back door dispensary’. They came with everything: Cracked callouses on the feet, horrible Naga sore, itch, cuts, wounds, goiters, ulcers, measles and it was wonderful to see how many were helped, some with the miracle drugs and others with soda mints”. (Houston, 1987:13). The back door dispensary opened many opportunities to witness for Christ to the non-Christians and it was a good way to build good will.

Harriet also taught the women the importance of cleanliness and sanitation. Each year she taught the girls in the women’s training school some basic lessons in cleanliness, home
nursing and child care. Child mortality was high then and many women died in childbirth. T.B too was prevalent. Almost all the people suffered from dysentery and malaria. Usually they gave out the medicines freely to those who need it. The Lothas were slow to send their girls to the mission hospitals for nurses training but slowly girls were sent to Jorhat and Kohima for nurses training.

The Houstons were the harbinger of women education and vocational training among the Lothas. After getting acquainted with the Lothas they realized that it was the women who needed help as they were the most backward. They decided to start a training school for women but there was no one qualified to be the teacher. After searching for a teacher they remembered Zanponi, who lived in Jorhat with her family where her husband served as a policeman. Although she had little education, because of her determination she learnt Assamese from a hired tutor. She also attended women’s Bible training in Jorhat. She was called to Vankhosung to help Mrs. Houston start the Lotha women’s training school. Then each church in the villages were requested to send at least one girl of sixteen years or older with good moral character to the training school. But the men folk and the pastors were reluctant. They could not effort to take the women out of the fields and send them to school. Moreover they were to get married early.

The opening day of the women’s training school had only one student. In two weeks time, however, seven girls enrolled for one year course. Zanponi and Harriet taught them life of Christ, the Christian women’s work in her home, church and the village. The girls were also taught sewing and knitting and music. Personal hygiene and sanitation was also taught. The enrollment increased in the following years. Many girls became women leaders in their village churches and union meetings. Thus with the efforts of Mrs Houston and Zanponi, a new day dawned for the Lotha women. In the 1952 Lotha Christian Association held in
Rephyim village, over eight hundred (800) women attended, women who rose to a new life of service and responsibility because of knowing Christ.

In January 1950 Six Lotha women attended the Angami women’s convention in Kohima. They came home inspired to establish their own Association. With little encouragement from the men, the Lotha women organized their Association. At the first meeting six hundred women attended. Harriet wrote, “At their second Association each local village women’s society brought their handful of rice offerings and everyone was pleased when it amounted to over six hundred rupees. The men were surprised too, and at their first church council meeting decided to ask the women’s Association for a contribution. The women refused. They wanted to support a women evangelist who would tour the villages preaching and teaching especially the women and children. A young woman, Orenyimi, who had finished the two year course in our Bible school volunteered and just before we left for furlough she began her work as the first women’s worker supported by the Lotha women’s Association.” (Houston, 1987:37-38).

Thus the missionaries now provided theological education and training to the local Lothas so that they could assume leadership and evangelical work themselves. It may be added that persons trained by the missionaries were also found efficient in their work in the Government offices etc. Braving the difficulties, trials and tribulations, these early missionaries to the Lothas devoted themselves to the people with admirable perseverance. The Rev and Mrs. Houston left the Lothas in 1953, after having stayed five years and three months, only to return after twenty years to attend the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Lotha Naga Baptist Association held on February 16-18 of 1973, where 86 churches with baptized membership of 12,435 attended. It was held at Vankhosung. Attended by five thousand Lotha Baptist Christians, the theme of the jubilee was “Ye shall be my witnesses”. The Houstons made the following concluding remarks; “Perhaps now it is our turn as
American Baptist to learn again this great truth from our ‘children’ in the faith who are now mature in the lord”. (1987:66).

THE NATIVE EVANGELISTS

It would be incomplete if mention is not made about the works done by the native missionaries who helped and worked with the American missionaries in the Naga Hills and also among the Lothas. The important role played by Godhula Babu in the formative years of the Naga mission should not be minimized. He was called ‘John the Baptist’ for the Naga mission. (Purtoshi, 1991:21). He was an Assamese ardent evangelist and school teacher who volunteered to make the first venture. In April 1872, Godhula and his wife Lucy, a former pupil in Mrs Whiting’s school, started for the hills. Godhula came into contact with some Naga men who went to the plains for trade. At Amguri tea garden too, Godhula met many men from Dekhahaimong (Molungyimsen) village and shared with them his rice, smoked and talked with them, and gradually gained the confidence of the Hill men. With the bold venture of Godhula, a successful Christian ministry among the Nagas was inaugurated. On December 18, 1872, Godhula along with Dr. Clark made a trip to Dekha haimong. The same year, fifteen men were baptized, marking the first Baptismal service ever held in Nagaland, and a humble beginning of the Naga church.

Robi Babu was another Assamese preacher in Impur. He was sent to Wokha to assist Dr and Mrs Witter from October 1885 to April 1886. In 1887, he returned to Wokha, during which he took initiative to send Lotha boys and girls to Impur for study. This was a great achievement because these students later became the backbone of the Lotha churches. In 1902, the first native baptism took place at Wokha with several young men. Regarding the
education of the Lotha Nagas, the report of 1903 mentioned that Robi, the Assamese teacher lived at Wokha and tried to carry on the mission works. (Sangma, 1987: 219).

In December 1896, Zilli, an Assamese preacher and teacher among the Aos was posted at Wokha station. He visited the mission field at Wokha and made arrangement for the removal of his family to Wokha, but he was suddenly taken ill and died on Christmas day.

LOTHA RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Proselytization made a slow start among the Lothas. About the initial response of the hill tribes to the new faith F. S. Downs wrote that, “The first conversion must have posed many psychological problems and barrier. Opposition became stronger and at times became threatening. Every Baptism was a signal for renewed antagonism. The Christians were not allowed to build churches inside the villages, fearing that it may offend the spirits and bring misfortune to the people”. (1971 : 125). So also the Christians all over the Lotha area were persecuted. The new converts in the villages were not allowed to stay in the family nor in the village. They were ex-communicated. They were even forbidden to drink water from the same village pond or to use the same pathway to go to the field. At any misfortune coming to the village, like epidemic, the Christians were blamed. The initial opposition was formidable with the entire traditional society pitted against the missionaries, and in many occasion the converts had to face the wrath of his family as well as of his fellow villagers.

Cases in point: Evangelist Chijamo of Pyangsa village was expelled from his village by order of the Government, on demand of the villagers, for embracing the new faith. In other cases, the entire Christian community was ex-communicated from their villages. The new converts at pongitong village were forced to go to a village called Mangasa (now abandoned), a few miles north-west of pongitong. Chenchio Ovung, the first educated man from
pongitong village and a pioneer Lotha Christian faced untold hardship and persecution at the hands of the non-Christian villagers of Pongitong. His step-father was struck by a deadly disease and was miraculously healed when he embraced Christianity in 1925. Another four more families joined them, all from the Ovung Clan, and so the non-Christian villagers mocked them by calling their faith as Ovung religion. In course of time, there were also converts from other Clans in the village. However, they were banished from the main village and had to establish two new villages for out-caste Christians. (Pongitong Jubilee Souvenir).

Chenchio Ovung and his step father were summoned to the court of the Deputy Commissioner, J. P. Mills, to hear grievances against them by the Dobashi, Goanbura and three elders. Some of the accusations labeled against the Christians were that they slashed the neck of chicken and other domestic animals, a method of blood sacrifice to appease the spirits in the animistic belief; they brew tea and ring bells during Church services which drive away blessings from the village; and they hate non-Christians and always insult and make fun of them. The D.C did not find the reasons grave enough to expel the Christians from the village. An elder by the name of Hacha stood up and claimed angrily that the Christians hated and insulted them, and threatened that if the Christians were not expelled, the non-Christians would leave the village. The Dobashi who acted as the interpreter lied to the D.C that the previous DC, J.H.Hutton had passed an order forbidding Christians from slaughtering animals by slashing the neck, brewing tea in the kheti(field) and ringing the bell. (NBCC Platinum jubilee, 2012:200). The DC, not wanting to overrule the order passed by his predecessor, ordered the Christians of Pongitong to find a new location for a Christian village on 9th December, 1930.

The next day was the exodus of the Christians of Pongitong, who went and established a new village called Mangasa. Lotha Churches from other villages came forward to help by clearing the jungle and building thatch huts. After five months, the village was abandoned
because of environmental problems. The villagers began to fall ill and die. Their Church leader, Yanshungo Ovung died on 5th July, 1931. Chenchio, who was studying in Impur Mission School, had to return to Mangasa to take charge of the Church. Due to severe water and soil contamination, 14 out of 24 Christians in Mangasa died.

The Christians requested the Pvuti (priest) of Pongitong to allow them to return to the village or provide for them an alternative site. The traditional society pitted against them. A regulation had already been made to impose a fine on any villager who converts to the new faith. It was only when the DC intervened that the traditional priest grudgingly earmarked a site called Longpyak for the Christians. Thus, after Mangasa village was abandoned, Longpyak village was founded in 1937. For ten years the Christians lived there, until in 1947, after paying a fine of 30Kgs of pork, the converts were allowed to return to the mother village, Pongitong, because the village was not ideal for human survival.

Meanwhile Chenchio was appointed as a teacher in the Government LP School, Pongitong in 1943. Thathungo Ovung took up the leadership of the Church as well as Goanbura of Longpyak village. (Pongitong Jubilee Souvenir). Within five years of Chenchio’s posting at Pongitong, the villagers started abandoning their traditional religion and converted to Christianity. Soon a complaint was lodged against the Christians to P.F. Adams, the then SDO, Mokokchung. They were accused of eating the tiger meat which was a taboo meat and a curse. To justify the case, Chongkhu, an animist volunteered to swear by the teeth of a tiger. The SDO was then compelled to order the Christians to leave Pongitong with a fine of Rupees 15.

In Longsa village, the villagers persisted in their animistic belief until the 1950s. In 1931, when the SDO of Mokokchung visited the village, the villagers and the GB (Guanbura) made it clear to him that the village would not allow the penetration of foreign religion into their land. They made a resolution that converts would be liable to pay a fine of fifty (50)
Rupees. Conversion would also entail expulsion from the village. During that period, a Lotha evangelist Chichamo of pyangsa village came to the village preaching the gospel and incidentally, the first convert made in this village was Nchanrhomo the Guanbura, who earlier announced the restrictions on converts. Accordingly, he was made to pay a fine of fifty Rupees, and expelled from the village in 1931. He lived in Wokha village until his death in 1938. (Longsa Baptist Church History, 1974: 03). It was only in 1950 that the first church was established in Longsa.

The leaders of the villages thought that the new religion would create confusion in the minds of the people and turn the village upside down (Clark, 1907: 17). Therefore, Christianity met a stiff resistance from the animists in the beginning. The response of the Lothas towards the new religion is described by M.M. Clark thus, which is worth quoting in full; “Glorifying in their independence, these savage hill men were utterly opposed to any movement that foreshadowed in the least any alliance whatever with this great and ever-encroaching power. Adherents of the old cruel faith were quick to see that the gospel of peace and love would rapidly empty their skull houses and put to rout most of the old customs handed down from forefathers, for whom they held the greatest reverence. The missionary’s presence and his teachings had spread like wild fire from mountain peak to mountain peak and everywhere was fostered the suspicious spirit. Hostility to the new religion waxed stronger and stronger. There was a division in the village councils; repeated efforts were made by the opponents of Christianity to inveigle their village into war with other villages, and thus to overwhelm by a strong war spirit the influence of the few Christians, whose teachings were so antagonistic to their military ambition, without the realization of which there could be for them no social or political standing in the community, and for which they would willingly imperil life. To intimidate the missionary, a war party of young men ambushed one whole week for human heads, which they intended to throw down before him as symbolical of what
he might expect himself in case he did not retreat to the plains. They returned, however, without the booty, but racked with fever, thus affording the missionary an opportunity of exercising some medical skill and taming their savagery”. (1907: 17).

There was hostility from the traditional society headed by the village pvuti (priest). A blatant case was the event of Okotso Village. By order of the British administration, the Christians of Okotso were exempted from paying taxes to the Village chief priest. When Rev Longwell visited Okotso in 1907, some of the village chieftains wanted to show their displeasure over the matter, and refused to talk to him facing each other. In spite of his repeated plea, they told him to say what he wanted to say, as they were able to hear from behind also. On his return journey to Impur, the missionary reported about the incident to the SDO of Mokokchung, who summoned the two chieftains to see him at Chungliyimsen. Although they dared to insult the missionary, they had no other choice but to rush for Chungliyimsen, which is more than 40 miles through thick jungle. When they reached the place, the sahib had left for Lakhuti, another 35 miles away. The sahib asked them to meet him there. Without proper food or rest they rushed to Lakhuti the next day, but on reaching it they found that the sahib had left for Merapani. They were ordered to see the sahib there. They resumed their trekking through thick jungle. At last they met him there and expected severe punishment for their incivility but the sahib simply told them to go to Impur and beg apology from the missionary. Their marathon trekking took five days covering not less than 250 miles. With shame they met the missionary and told him whether he would forgive him. The missionary gladly forgave them and sent them back.

In 1909, Rev. Longwell visited Okotso to baptize 23 new believers. Having done the baptism they were getting ready to start the worship service when some villagers gathered in a spot and began shouting. Rev. Longwell took it casually thinking that such was the usual practice of the Nagas. But when no one dared to come to the Church, and the gathering grew
bigger, the missionary sensed something. It is interesting to quote the experience of Rev R. B Longwell in the village of Okotso which he narrated in an article entitled “Leaving Okotso by Moonlight”, “The full moon of January was just itself above the eastern horizon. My evening meal was almost ready. The meeting house was as lonesome as ever. The crowd at the upper end of the village now numbered about a hundred and was decidedly noisy. At this moment the teacher showed himself in front of my tent and suggested that the evening meeting was omitted. I asked for an explanation. He then told me that he had overheard the plans that were developing at the head of the village. He said that the crowd had decided on a program the first act of which was to take the missionary’s head. The second act was to take his, the teacher’s head. (Ichungo). The third was to take the head of Etsussao, the most influential Christian in the village, and one who, indeed, had done more than any other to start the little church. The last number of this unusually interesting program was to light upon the Christian as a body and cut to pieces all who did not escape to the jungle”. (Okotso Baptist Ekhumkho Motsu 2004:107)

Realizing that they had omitted a crime, the villagers send two chiefs, namely Mphyosao and Lichio with a cock in hand to appease the fleeing missionary. But the missionary was told by his cook Kinukaba that the villagers were sharpening their weapons to cut off his head, hence there was no choice but to leave okotso. Rev. Longwell on his way to Impur reported to J. Needham, the then SDO of Mokokchung about the incident. By the order of the SDO, the people of Okotso were summoned to Mokokchung and order was given to identify the culprits who plotted to kill the missionary, but the non-Christians confided the matter within themselves. As a result, 500 labor force was imposed on the non-Christians as punishment. They were sent to work in the field of two Dobashis. They were made to work the whole day, neither giving rest nor chance to straighten their back. Only after testing the hard labor, some of them realized and said that, the Kestans (Christians) are always backed by
the whites, whereas there is no one to rescue them when such occasion arises. On this ground, some of them resolved to become Christian than to suffer in the hands of the whites. Subsequently, 30 household became Christians just for the sake of escaping from punishment. They later became staunch believers. (Okotso Baptist Ekhumkho Motsu 2004: 99).

Dr. Witter reported in 1888 that when the first preaching tour was made in the Lotha villages the same year, it attracted many attentive listeners but none of them were willing to leave their demon worship. (Murry, 1979:21). The main reason for the objection was that the converts jeopardize the well-being of the entire community. In a tribal set-up as that of the Lothas, the individual is protected, cared for and loved by the clan and the village. One is never allowed to starve or reduced to begging. The clan looks after the welfare of the family and even avenges the death of a clansman at the hands of enemies. In a society such as this, therefore, there is restricted freedom of action for the individual. As M. Horam puts it; ‘he is a link in the chain of his society, and a weak or broken link will affect the whole chain’. (1972: 39).

Festivals among the Lothas require the participation of every individual in the society. The Christian missionaries were uncompromising regarding the new converts participating in any animistic ritual. Violation of the traditional rituals and customs made the villagers fear ill luck, and called for punishment. The village not willing to risk the ire of its Gods was often instrumental in the exodus of the Christian converts of a village and thus to founding of new ones. A case in point: In 1927, newly converted Christians of Akuk village migrated to found a new village which came to be called Lio Longidang. In 1930, Osa yan village, about one kilometers west of Pangti, was founded by converts who fled from pangti village. The village was abandoned after several years due to environmental problems. (Interview with Wosumo, Pangti Village 12:06:2014)
This initial opposition to the new faith which was formidable makes us to wonder as to what were the factors behind it. Horam traced the answer to the mainstay of the tribal people, which was agriculture. (1972:40). The early tribal life centered round the soil, the ancestral fields, sowing and harvesting. Village feasts were dictated by the agricultural calendar and the seasons. Most religious ceremonies and festivals were directly connected with the fields. Deities and spirits were appeased so as not to bring misfortune but to bless the village with good harvest. Genna, sacrifices, ceremonies, rites and rituals were observed to secure good harvests. In other words, the entire social structure was dependent on the economic self-sufficiency of the villages. Agricultural success and good harvests depended on the mood of the Deities and spirits most of whom were malignant by nature and whom, the villagers could not afford to offend. The village could never allow any individual to offend the spirits, for the repercussion would be felt by the entire village. Therefore, when misfortune came to the villages, the Christian converts were blamed that by bringing a new faith to the villages they offended the spirits.

THE PIONEER LOTHA CHRISTIANS

In 1885, when the Witters arrived at Wokha there were only two converts. Mhomo Tungoe of Wokha Village and Senlamo Ezung of Longsachung Village. The Lotha church Wokha records Mhomo Tungoe as the first convert among the Lothas, converted through Robi, the Assamese evangelist in 1884. (Kyong Baptist churches Association,1998:10). Both received education from Impur and were baptized by Dr. Clark, the then missionary at Molung in 1885. Mhomo Tungoe became a pioneer missionary among the Lothas but missionary activity was cut short because of his untimely death at the age of twenty-one in 1906. He was buried with Christian funerary rites performed by two Ao Molung school
mates. (Wokha Town Baptist Church History: 07). Senlamo Ezung, on his return from Molung at the completion of his studies, opened a school at his village Longsachung with thirteen students. But it was not until 1928 that Christianity began to grow in these villages. This first batch of converts could not do much because of the absence of resident missionary at Wokha.

The second batch of converts became the pillars in the building of the Lotha churches. This batch includes Nkhao, Shanruo, Shanjamo and Chijamo. Their work was not confined to the Lotha churches only but extended to other tribes too.

Mr. Nkhao Jungi, son of Nsao Jungi of Yikhum village was born in the 1880s. An orphan since a boy, he was taken to Impur by a visiting missionary from where he received education upto standard four. One of the first two converts among the Lothas in 1896, Mr. Nkhao was baptized on 2\textsuperscript{nd} Oct 1898 by Rev. F.P. Haggard at Impur. (Downs, 1971:126.). The same year, his brother Shanjamo was send to Impur to study. Along with other few converts, He established a church at Yikhum village in midst of opposition from the non Christian villagers. He was mocked and tortured for preaching the gospel. The church building which he constructed was dismantled three times by the villagers and he received all the humiliation, insult and neglect. The villagers fined them five (5) Rupees and the church was pulled down.(Yikhum Baptist church history record). Thereafter, with his family, Nkhao went to Mekukla village to preach the gospel of salvation, but instead of accepting the new faith he was unceremoniously rejected with insults and ridicule. Therefore he returned home full of sorrow and shame. (Kikon; 2004:04). At his death, the pastoring was entrusted to his brother Shanjamo Jungi.

Mr. Shanjamo Jungi, was the first Naga to visit the USA in 1905. Born on 2\textsuperscript{nd} Jan 1882 at Yikhum village, he had his school education at Clark’s mission school, Impur, from july 1898 till 1904. He was baptized on 4\textsuperscript{th} Jan 1899 at Impur by Rev. Dowd. In 1901, he
worked as a missionary at Okotso village. Due to his zeal in the mission service, he was taken to the USA by Rev. S.A. Perrine in 1905. There he studied for some time at Mt. Hermon School. Besides the US, he visited UK, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Egypt, Palestine and several cities in India like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Agra, Jaipur and Gauhati, etc. on his return to Wokha from the states, Shanjamo took up pastoral ministry in many places in Wokha and Mokokchung. He taught in Vankhosung School too. He worked as a pastor at Changtongya (Mokokchung district) in 1910, Okotso 1911, Changpang 1912-13, Yikhum 1924, Changsu old 1921-22, and Longtang (Litami) 1927-29. Between 1915 and 1917, he worked at Impur mission centre.

During the First World War in 1917, the British authorities put Shanjamo in charge of the Naga Labor corps to France. A devoted worker and philanthropist, Shanjamo took up the task of spreading the gospel. Industrious and indefatigable, he travelled from place to place with his luggage on his back preaching the Good news of God’s love, enduring hunger, thirst, fatigue and often humiliation from the animists. (Kikon: 1993:5). In 1928, Mr. Shanjamo donated Rupees one hundred for purchase of Land for the mission centre Vankhosung. Between 1930 and 1937, he served as teacher at the mission school at Vankhosung. In 1945, he returned to Vankhosung as a caretaker at the mission centre and retired from the job in November 1948. Widely travelled, Shanjamo was well versed in English, Assamese and Ao besides his mother tongue. He translated several Gospel literature and contributed in the preparation of the outline Grammar of the Lotha dialect. Mr. Shanjamo who served with utmost dedication and self sacrifice, enriching the Lothas in knowledge and widening their intellectual and mental horizon, died a poor man in 1956. (Kikon, 1993:05).

Mention may also be made of Shanrio Ngulli of Tsungiki village. He is one of the earliest Lotha converts. He received elementary education from Impur, converted in 1896 and baptized in oct 1898 by Rev. F.P. Haggard at Impur. After few years of study, he served as a
teacher at Wokha village school. He established a church at tsungiki village in 1918 and pastored there till he died in the 1930s.

Another pioneer evangelist among the Lothas was Chijamo ovung. His achievement was in pastoral and evangelical fields. He studied at Impur mission school in 1898. Ovung was baptized in Nov 1899 by Rev. F.P Haggard. After having received Bible training in Assamese at Gauhati he returned to work at Impur. In 1907, he established a school at Tsungiki village, Wokha, where he worked as a pastor and teacher. He also served in the Government Dispensary at Wokha station in 1913. During this period he established a church at Wokha station. Mr. Ovung extended much help in procuring land from Wokha village for opening a mission centre at Vankhosung. Appointed as evangelist by the Lotha Christian Association in 1926, Chijamo travelled to almost all the villages of Wokha, strengthening churches and also helping new churches to be established. It is to be noted that Evangelist Chijamo, the first Christian from his native village, Pyangsa, was expelled from his village by order of the Government, on demand of the villagers, for embracing the new faith. He, however, visited his village on several occasion preaching the Gospel. At his old age, he returned to his village where he died in 1944.

THE GROWTH OF CHURCHES:

The first church in Lotha area was established in 1904 at Okotso village, which is on the North-eastern part of Wokha bordering the Aos. The person responsible for the establishment of this church was Etssisao Ngulli of Okotso village. Through the preaching of Shanjamo and Shanrio, Etssisao became the first convert in Okotso in 1901. He then joined the Impur Mission School the same year and was Baptised on June 22, 1902 at Impur by Rev. Dowd. (Okotso Baptist Ekhumkho Motsu, 2004: 97). While in study he often shared the good
news of salvation to his native people, and by the time he came back to his village after finishing his studies, six people namely, Rilamo, Rashumthung, Wonyimo, Zantsemo, Ibonsao and Lojamo readily became Christians. Following their conversions, they started a small fellowship and thus the first church in the Lotha area was established in 1904. M.M. Clark wrote, “A fairly strong church has been established among the Lothas in Okotso”. (1907:156) The six converts were baptized at Impur on January 16, 1904 along with two others, Akhomo and Thunglamo.

The member of the first Church grew steadily. Tssolo was baptized on March 16 and Lanbemo Merry of Okotso was baptized on July 10, 1904. Seven women namely, Emiv, Thungsali, Kholam, Pfuchinyimi, Wozano, Chumjan and Pvuden were baptized at Impur on October 29 1904 after which the women fellowship was started at Okotso. In 1906, another 16 new members were baptized by Rev. Perrine and their membership was maintained at Impur Church, and transferred to Okotso Church on April 8, 1906. (Okotso Church History, 2004: 98). The rapid growth of the church is nothing short of a miracle under the leadership of the young pastor Etssisao. He was the first pastor of Okotso Baptist church where he served diligently between 1905 and 1912 when he took up a Government job. At this stage Okotso was a part of the Ao Association and it remained so till 1922.

In 1923, the Lotha Churches were separated from the Ao Association and the Lotha Association was formed with twelve churches. A meeting of the following eleven Churches was held at Okotso: Mekukla, Lakhuti, Okotso, Champang, Bhandari Yan, Sanis, Yikhum, Changsu, Tsungiki, Wokha, Longtsung and Nungying. (Wokha Town Baptist Church history, 1994:9). The first chairman and secretary of the Lotha Association were Renjamo Kikon of Mekokla and Yichungo Ngully of Okotso respectively. From that year onwards the annual Association of the Kyong Baptist churches Assoiation (KBES) was held every year. The Lotha church claims that the first Lotha Association was held in November, 1926. (Philips,
1976:105). Evangelists Ibonsao and Chichamo were faithful. Baptism rose to one hundred every year. Ibonsao baptized 168 converts in 1929, making the Lotha church membership 758. The Annual Lotha Association in 1932 was held at N. Longidang village and it reported the number of Lotha Baptised member as one thousand. By 1946, there were forty-six churches in the Lotha area with baptized members of two thousand. By 1950, the number of converts rose to four thousand.

Other pioneer Lotha churches which started the pace of proselytisation in the Lotha area are Yikhum, established in 1906, Changpang in 1912, Mekukla in 1913, Tsingiki in 1918, Wokha Town Baptist church in 1919, Lakhuti in 1920, Sanis in 1921, Longtsung in 1921, Bhandari yang church in 1921, Nungying in 1922. (Lotha Baptist Churches Association KBES Platinum Jubilee, 1998: 18). Besides these Baptist churches, churches of other denominations were also established in the Lotha area, which includes Roman Catholic church established in Lakhuti village in 1951, the first catholic church in Nagaland. Assembly of God church came to the Lotha area in 1961. Besides these, NCRC, United Pentecostal church and Seven days Adventist also came to the Lotha area. (Yikhum Baptist Church Centennial celebration, 1998 :5).

THE MISSION SCHOOL

To Rev. W. E Witter and his wife goes the credit for many ‘firsts’ in the Lotha land. The American Baptist missionaries saw schools as the most effective means of reaching the people. The emphasis on education was largely instrumental which led to the success of the missionaries in breaking through to the Lothas. The first missionary school was started in the form of Sunday school early in 1885 by the Witters. On Sunday morning of August 2,1885, Mrs Witter gathered several Naga boys about her and began the first formal teaching of
Christianity to the Lotha Nagas. It was a day of small thing but from which bore the rich fruits. (Sangma. Vol-11, 1992:218). They opened another Sunday school for the mixed races found at Wokha. Children were taught the Cathechism and Lord’s Prayer. Simultaneously translation work started. But the school work was not very encouraging. On August 15, 1885, a day school was started but it closed soon because of poor attendance. The parents were not prepared to send their children to the missionary school. The initial reservation on the part of the parents to send their children to school was primarily related to economics. The parents contended that the children cannot eat unless they work in the fields. The parents were still not willing to lose a hand in the field or to look after the infants at home. Therefore the parents asked that their children be paid for attending school. This practice was commonplace in the early years as Rev. Witter reported in July 1887, “To get this savages to school, we must at least give them their rice; for the parents have as yet no desire that they be taught to read and write, and would as soon throw their rice in the fire as to send it to the station for the support of a boy in the school”. (Murry (ed), 1979: 10). Besides, as the Lothas refuse to let the girls go away from their villages as they expect to receive a large sum for them in marriage, the few children that attended the school were boys only.

By 1910, six schools were set up but soon abandoned. Mr. Longwell reported in 1910, “In recent years, six schools have been organized and abandoned in the Lotha tribe. I do not know any reason than that no missionary ever looked in upon them”. (Murry (ed),1979:41). However the clouds over the Lotha region began to scatter and shine when the Lotha students at Impur began to become Christians. Perrine reported; “The Lotha is perhaps the most encouraging part of the work. Boys have been drawn from every part of that tribe for the training school. Good numbers have become Christians. A few girls have been induced to attend Impur School. They are the very first among Lothas.” (The Assam Baptist Missionary Conference, 1992:57).
A school was opened for the Lothas at Furkating in 1920, which was later shifted to Vankhosung in 1928. Dr. Bailey, the then missionary in charge of the Lothas, secured permission to build the Lotha Christian centre at Vankhosung in 1926-27, and the Furkating school was shifted there. This school was shifted to Wokha town in 1944 which was taken over by the Government. In 1964, an English Medium school was opened by the KBES which was later rechristened as Shanjamo memorial school on Nov 22, 1968. The first teachers were David Mangratee and Renchilo Kinghen. At the completion of the construction of the school building, the annual conference of the KBES was held there in 1968. (SMBES record, 1989:01).

THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

The growing need of evangelism led to the opening of a vernacular Bible school in 1946 called ‘Lotha Bible School’ in Vankhosung, promising young men to receive training. The school was founded, sponsored and functions under the shelter of the Kyong Baptist Ekhumkho sanrhyutsu KBES (The Lotha Baptist churches Association). Rev. Tanquist was the first principal and Rev. Zanao Yanthan, who was the co founder of the college served as its first head master. The first batch of students enrolled in the school between 1946-47 includes Rev. Anyimo Patton, Rev. Tsenaq Ezung, Mr. Chumbemo shitiri, Vanthungo Ngullie, Wobemo odyuo, Myamo odyuo, Wopansao Ngullie and Loshumlo Tungoe. Till 1990, the school offered two years vernacular course with Lotha dialect as the medium of instruction. It offered certificate of theology and later, Graduate in Theology by 1991. The school was later re-christened as Witter Bible Institute with English as the medium of instruction. The institute was named after Dr. W. E. Witter, the first missionary officially assigned to the Lotha area. In 1998, it has been accredited to Asia Theological Association.
In 1999, the institute was again upgraded to a full-fledged degree course offering a four year bachelor of theology course and was renamed as the Witter Bible College. In December, 2010, the college was again renamed as the Witter Theological College with its motto “Training today, Leaders tomorrow”. (NBCC platinum Jubilee, 2012: 93).

In the year 2006, the College was accorded a three-year provisional recognition by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC). The KBES and the faculty have moved for affiliation of the college to the Senate of Serampore, and a permanent recognition to NBCC. The college is also recognized by the Government of Nagaland.

THE KYONG BAPTIST EKHMUKHO SANRHYUTSU KBES (THE LOTHA BAPTIST CHURCHES ASSOCIATION

In 1888, Dr and Mrs Witter left Wokha and the Lotha field was left under the supervision of missionaries at Impur. From the establishment of the first church at Okotso in 1904 till 1923, the Lotha churches remained under the Ao Association. By 1923, the strength of the Lotha church had grown to twelve and with that strength they felt the need of a separate Association. These churches are: Okotso, Yikhum, Jangpang, Mekokla, Wokha Town, Tsungiki, Longtsung, Lakhuti, Changsu Yanhen, Sanis, Bhandari Yan and Nungying.

The growing strength of the Lotha churches, the long and tiring travelling and the Language barriers in attending the Ao Christian Association annual meetings were the factors which compelled the Lotha Christians to form their own Association. On June 21, 1923, a meeting was held at Okotso village and the Association was formed with twelve (12) established Churches and Rajamo kikon of Mekukla and Yichungo Ngully of Okotso were the first Chairman and Secretary respectively. (Yikhum Baptist Church records, 1998:6)
In 1928, the dream of the missionaries to own a Christian centre in Lotha area was realized by Dr. J. R. Bailey. Through his active initiation, the present KBES Mission Centre, Vankhosung was purchased. Shanjamo Jungi donated an amount of Rupees one hundred towards the purchase of the land. But with the untimely demise if Dr. Bailey, the Lothas were left without a resident missionary. It was only in 1948 that the mission centre was occupied by the Rev and Mrs Houston. After the Houstons left in 1953, the mission was left in the hands of the Lotha local evangelists. Between 1953- 1958, Rev. Ahamo Patton served as the field secretary of the KBES, Rev. Nzanbemo Murry was the field Director in the years 1959- 1973. Between 1974- 1980, Rev. Yankey patton served as the Executive Secretary , Rev. Chimomo Yanthan as Executive Secretary between 1981- 1989. Rev Nzanbemo Murry again served the KBES in the capacity of Executive Secretary between 1990- 1993. Rev. John Ovung took charge as Executive secretary between 1994 and 2001. He was succeeded by Rev. N. T. Murry who served between 2002 and 2005. Rev. Dr. Nrio Ezung served from 2006 till 2013. At present the executive secretary of the KBES is Rev. M.C. Kithan.

From a humble beginning, the KBES has grown to ten Departments and thirty – six employees by 2012. Today, the KBES has 121 affiliated churches, 10 fellowships, 18 Licentiate pastors and 64 ordained Ministers. (NBCC platinum Jubilee, 2012: 93). The Association has a total Baptized membership of about 59,856 as per the census of 2010. The Christian population of Wokha District accounts to about 95 %, out of which 85% are Baptist.

Realizing the objective of Mission and Evangelism, the KBES has been involved with various evangelism with full – fledged Secretary for Mission and Evangelism. One such mission is the 10/ 40 window of the Great Himalayan region, Myanmar, Bangladesh, etc. In 1978, the KBES launched an outreach Mission, collaborating with the Nihang Karbi – Anglong Baptist Association (NKBA). The KBES has also worked with the South Bank Boro Baptist Association (SBBBCA), Assam Nepali Baptist Churches Association (ANBCA) and
the Nagaland – Assam Border Mission. The KBES still supports the Nagaland – Assam Border Mission. Four schools were started at Manja, Hawaipur, Langhen and N. C. Hills and several individuals were imparted leadership training sponsored by the KBES.

The KBES also spread its evangelism to Arunachal Pradesh. A full time missionary is sponsored at Selaikhati town, 18 kilometres away from Arunachal border. A missionary cottage is constructed in memory of Chuchumo Ezung by his children. It is christened by Dr. Nrto Ezung as Yimkha village Baptist church Golden Jubilee building. Besides these, the KBES sponsored local churches, fellowship groups, women leaders, individuals and families under the Home Mission Fund of the KBES. (NBCC Platinum Jubilee, 2012: 94).

THE BEGINNING OF OTHER CHRISTIAN GROUPS

Up until 1950, the Christianity practiced in the Lotha region was that of the Baptist Church. A major challenge faced by the established Baptist Church was posed by the entry of the Catholic Mission in 1950 and the spread of the charismatic Revival Movement which first appeared in 1960.

CATHOLIC MISSION

Among the Naga tribes, it was the Lothas and the Angamis who first came into contact and responded positively to the Catholic mission. The first catholic missionary to enter Nagaland was Fr. Marcellinus Molz, a German Salvatorian (SDB) from Bondashil (present Bangladesh). He reached Tamlu (Phom Naga area) in 1908. (Karotemprel, 1993: pp225-26). Another Catholic missionary to come to the Naga Hills was also a Salvatorian, Fr. Ansgar Koenigsbauer. He visited the Naga Hills in 1912 on his way to Imphal from Bondashil.
However, systematic efforts to plant a Catholic church in the Naga Hills started only after the Nagas had successfully resisted the Japanese expansion and control over the hills. At that time, the British Government built a hospital at Kohima but soon left without filling the required staff. This need was communicated by Sir Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam, to Bishop Stephen Ferrando, following a visit the Governor had made to Kohima in connection with the future of the Naga Hills in independent India. (Syiemlieh, 1990: 41). Promptly, two sisters, Margarita and Guadalupe accompanied by their Chaplain Monsignor Bars were sent to offer their services to the Naga Hospital. They arrived in Kohima at the end of December 1948.

Monsignor Bars was succeeded by Fr. Morocchino SDB in 1952. During the years that Marocchino was in the Naga Hills he was able to establish a small but very vibrant Catholic community. In 1963 when Fr. Marocchino left Kohima, there was a small but fervent group of Angami Naga Catholics in Kohima area. Among his first converts was Mr. John Jasokie, the ex-minister of Nagaland. (Karotemprel, 1993:226).

Simultaneously, with the Angami mission, work was also in progress to take the Catholic faith to the Lotha tribe. The Lothas made frequent visits to the markets in the plains of Assam for barter trade with the plainsmen. It was here in the railroads of Frukating and Golaghat that the Lothas came into contact with the Catholic fathers. The first contact with the Lothas by the Catholic Fathers at Golaghat goes back to 1946 when Fr. Nyans employed a large group of men to clear the jungle for the mission station. As early as then, Fr. Nyans hoped that his mission would also take the Catholic faith to the tribes of the Naga Hills. (Syiemlieh, 1990:49). Some Lotha working group also went for clearing work of the mission compound. At that time Fr. Nyans said to the Lothas, “I am telling you, one day your people (tribe) and your children will come here for education”. (Lungsa Katholik Ekhumkho silver Jubilee 1963-88: 9).
In 1950, seven members (families) of the Lakhuti Church were involved in church disciplinary action which required their apology for their misconduct. Four members apologized and reconciled to the church, but the rest three did not want to go back to the Baptist church. Therefore, on 5th April 1951, they visited the Catholic Church at Golaghat and expressed their willingness to embrace Catholicism. Before they proceeded to Golaghat, the three dissidents made a bold statement that, “despite opposition, and even if none joined them, they were determined to become catholic”. (Longsa Katholik Ekhumkhoe jubilee, 1998: 10). The three were Yantsao Yanthan, Shampano Humtsoe and Chenisao Humtsoe.

On April 7, 1951 these men walked to Wokha and met M. Kithan, a prominent Lotha and M. Kinghen, the Chairman of the Lotha Bench court and enquired whether it was wrong to take to Catholicism. These simple villagers were assured that there was nothing wrong in what they had done and that freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Indian constitution. (Syiemlieh, 1990: 50). They also went to Vankhosung Mission centre and met Rev. Houston to clarify if it was a sin to join the Catholic Church. Rev Houston replied, “You must decide this by yourself. I cannot say that you are committing a sin by embracing Catholicism because the Catholic Church is the beginning of all Churches.” (Lungsa Katholik silver jubilee1988: 10). On April 10, they made another visit to Golaghat and on April 12 the three Lothas met Fr. F. Bollini who instructed them in the faith and later baptized them establishing themselves as the first catholics in Nagaland.. They organized the first Catholic Church in Lotha area at Lakhuti in May 1951. (Murry, 1976:29).

Initially, there was some opposition from the Baptist brethren in their village. Braving the challenges in the face of opposition from the Baptists, they built the first church at Lakhuti and the first religious service was conducted on 1st may 1951. The Lotha Baptist church council, concerned about the formation of the Catholic Church called a meeting, which was attended by thirty- six delegates from 15 villages. The report of the Secretary Khodao
Yanthan shows the Agenda of the meeting as “Remedy for the Roman members of Lakhuti village”. (Lungsa Catholic Silver Jubilee, 1988:11). Bishop Orester Marengo, the then Bishop of Dibrugarh visited his Lotha flock in 1955 together with Fr. J. Larrea SDB and exhorted them to be strong. (Karotemprel1993:226). Fr. Larrea learned the Lotha language almost to perfection. The song that he composed for the village is now used as the village anthem by all irrespective of the faith they belong to.

The response to the start of the Catholic Church among the Lothas of Lakhuti was encouraging, as even though without a Catechist among them yet, their membership increased. Louis Yanthan was later appointed as the first Catechist. (Syiemleih, 1990:52).

In the beginning of 1955, Fr. Larrea made preparation to open a Catechist school for Lotha boys at Dibrugarh. Along with the boys, Lotha girls were sent to study in the Don Bosco School at Dibrugarh with the hope that they would become leaders in their villages. This school was later shifted to Wokha in 1965. At that time the school had 96 students. The Catholic mission contributed much in the field of education in the Lotha area.

NAGALAND CHRISTIAN REVIVAL CHURCH (NCRC)

Besides the Catholic Church, there are other churches of different denominations in the Lotha area. Around the year 1960, a preacher, Benjamin by name formed a group of Christians who emphasize second Baptism of the Holy Spirit. He was a freelance preacher from Shillong and Jorhat who did not have membership in any Church. (Mozhui,2004:55). There was a call for a second baptism, a step towards getting gifts of the spirit manifested in speaking tongues, seeing visions, and prophesying. These were either preceded by or followed by fasting and praying. It affected the Baptist Churches and a split became inevitable, for the extremity that the revivalists displayed in their worship
contradicted the basic Baptist tenets. They formed a separate body from the Baptist Church called Nagaland Christian Revival Church. The NCRC was divided into three separate groups, each under a leader. One of the three, Tsenthungo Lotha organized the first Assembly of God (AG) church in Lotha area, in N. Longidang village. The seventh day Adventist and Spirit of Faith are other churches established recently in the Lotha area.

Despite overwhelming odds the early missionaries rendered yeomen’s services to the Lothas in reclaiming them from the primitive lives. The introduction of the new religion brought tremendous changes in the character and habits of the Lothas. They learnt the value of peace, tolerance and peaceful co-existence with their fellow-men and neighbors. They recognized the value of education, sanitation and better living conditions. Christian values of universal brotherhood and the growth of education had widened their outlook, and better economic opportunities. The advent of Christianity gave a powerful push to the wheel of social change and the Lothas had taken a long stride ahead.