

CHAPTER V11

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary

7.1.1 Spread of Christianity

The year 1894 marked the beginning of missionary activity in Manipur that played a crucial role in the spread of Christianity in the state. Interestingly, the missionary's effort to spread the Christian faith met with success only among the Tangkhuls.

Christianity was first introduced to the Tangkhuls in 1896. William Pettigrew was the first foreign missionary who arrived at Imphal with the permission of the then political Agent of Manipur in 1894. However, the British government prohibited his missionary activities among the orthodox Meitei Hindus in the Imphal valley, as the King was against the proselytization of his subjects. The state authorities instead advised Pettigrew to work among the hill tribes. In 1896, Pettigrew came to Ukhrul and started his missionary work. The entry of Christian missionary was not an easy task. At first, the Tangkhul people were reluctant and hesitant of the new faith as narrated by my informants.

In spite of Missionary activity till about 1950, Christians were tortured, chased out from homes/villages, fined and persecuted in different forms. According to the informants the spread of Christianity continued despite adverse conditions meted out on them. In fact it was rapid after the Second World War and the post independence period of the country. There was a fundamental change in the social

outlook resulting in mass reception of the new faith and a strong conservative Church eventually emerged. Gradually those who professed Christianity became a majority. Thus, when the missionaries left the state in 1954, the churches in Ukhrul flourished and the new era of native churches began. Then native leaders took over the leadership and shouldered the responsibility to the best of their capability.

The study reveals that native people played a significant role in the growth and expansion of the Christian Church. Native missionaries, many of whom had little or no formal theological training and only minimal Christian literature beyond a vernacular Bible (in part or in whole), acted as crucial agents in the propagation and spread of Christianity in and around Tangkhul inhabited areas and beyond. Furthermore, Christian missionaries had already contributed to the community's development in the field of education, health care and literature.

There are three Christian denominations operating in Ukhrul today. They are the American Baptist, Roman Catholic and Seventh Days Adventist. The Baptists who have been in the area longest commemorated their 100th year of the arrival of Rev. William Pettigrew on 7-10 March 1996 by setting up monoliths. The monoliths may be seen as the continuation of the commemorative practice of the traditional belief system.

7.1.2 Impact of Christianity

In the Tangkhul society, changes are seen at various levels -at the personal or individual level, societal level and at the level of tribe as a whole. The separation

among these three levels is of course artificial, as in their everyday lives they constantly mingle.

7.1.2.1 Personal level/ Individual level

The personal testimonies collected during my fieldwork suggest a range of factors that influenced conversion amongst the Tangkhuls. The greatest reason for people converting to Christianity was the assurance and hope of salvation, which the Christian faith gave them. Furthermore, adopting Christianity kept them away from the ritualistic demands of *Hau* that involved “unprofitable” expenditure of time, labour and money. Today wealth is invested in things like children’s education. This can be further understood through the narrative of the following informant.

Case 1

Name of the informant: Mrs. Ngalashingai

Age: 100 years old

“I am the wife of Oja Marasan from Taloi village. At first I studied at Ukhrul till class IV and then shifted to Kangpokpi where I studied till Class VI. From then on I studied at Jorhat Mission School till Class X or matric. My husband was the first headmaster of Ukhrul Upper Primary (U.P) School. After marriage we settled in Ukhrul town.

I remember as a non-Christian how my mother had to spend a lot of time and energy preparing zam- khor (rice beer). It was not an easy task. Preparing zam-khor is an elaborate time consuming task. It has to be meticulously timed and involves a long and tedious process of preparation. You must remember that the rice to make

the rice beer had to be grown and harvested on our green lush paddy field and after harvest stored in the granary. We then take the paddy from the barn, dry it in the sun and then pound the paddy and dehusk it. Once the paddy is pounded then a long process of washing, soaking and fermentation of the take place. This is not an easy task. In fact I remember my mother and I as the eldest daughter had to wake up early at dawn to be the first ones to fetch water from rakhong (water source) before anyone disturbs it. My mother was known for making one of the finest rice beer in the village and everyone looked forward to having a sip of her rice beer. Later on, I came to know that our missionary and our Church leaders banned rice beer as a mark to differentiate us from the non-Christian. We stopped making it at home after our conversion to Christianity. The assurance and hope of salvation through Christ our Lord, which my brother explained to us, was irresistible. My mother many a time expresses her regret that she had not known this faith earlier. I personally remember her being very happy that she is free from the tedious, tiring and time consuming task of making zam-khor.

I saw my parents after their conversion investing all time, labour and money they had for my brother's education and further studies. They would often walk to Ukhrul carrying rice in the basket (sopkai) to give my brother and later my younger sister rice, vegetables, dry fishes, dry meat, money etc. My brother was able to complete his B.Th in 1951. Then on he served the people of Manipur tirelessly and faithfully. Many a time he walked on foot evangelizing different villages all over Manipur and even other parts of Northeast. We are so proud of him. Christianity has been a source of blessing for our family especially my mother and even for me. As a

wife I look after my husband and our eight children. My life has been a wonderful journey since then. ”

A Christian breaks her/his day with religious prayers and closes it with prayers offered to God. A brief prayer is also offered before starting the day's work, before every meal and also before sleeping at night. A Christian refrains from doing any major works on Sunday and spends the day in prayers and singing hymns. Christianity has brought changes in a person's mannerism, the daily activities and also in her/his religious life.

Case 2

Name of the informant: Leishiphy

Age: 30 years old

“After being converted, I became a changed person. I have this strong desire to know more about God and my urge to be with Him makes me want to live a righteous and prayerful life”.

A Christian's life is always occupied with church activities. In some of the Baptist Churches in Ukhrul, there are five church services in a week. The general church services are held every Sunday morning and evening, Wednesday evening service is for womenfolk, Saturday night service is for youth and the married men have their service on every second Saturday afternoon. Children attend Sunday school every Sunday afternoon. Here, they are taught choruses, Bible stories and verses from the Bible.

During such services, one is asked to lead the service, pray or read out scriptures for the whole congregation. Pastor, church elders and other Christian leaders like missionaries, evangelists, and reverends preach the words of God. This way, everybody gets a chance to participate and are exposed to social activities. Camps, seminars, revival crusades, conference, etc. are organized every year to expand their horizon and sharpen their personality.

Christianity has groomed a person to a large extent (Zehol 2009). As seen from the different case studies, Christianity indeed helps in personality development. It widens a person's worldview, changes her/ his way of thinking and is more exposed through different programmes and activities of the church. The church trains a person to become a leader through its programme of leadership training. The church services and the weekly family worship service give various spiritual lessons from the Bible. But not all the Christians are sincere and committed. There are many who have converted just in name only. Many teenage boys and adults drink and smoke that are against the norms and doctrines of Christianity.

7.1.2.2 Societal level

The changeover from the traditional belief system to Christianity had a great impact on Tangkhul society. A typical Tangkhul family is patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal in form. The present study reveals that the family structure remains the same while the role of the father, mother and children have undergone some changes under the influence of Christianity.

The importance of marriage among the Tangkhuls has not been altered. They may have embraced Christianity but the present marriage system is not totally Christian nor is it totally traditional. Though the proceedings and forms of marriage have changed considerably, it still involves observance of the cultural practices such as the rule of clan exogamy (i.e. marriage outside of one's father's clan), community feast, gifts of shawls and food. The customary rule of marriage negotiation is still continued even though most weddings are now conducted by the Church pastor-officials, rather than by village elders or the traditional priests. Christianity has not completely taken away the traditional customs and culture from the Tangkhuls. No doubt, Christianity has initiated a process of far-reaching social and cultural change among them.

Christianity has affected the dormitory system—a core cultural space for youth in traditional Tangkhul society. The introduction of Christian mission and the subsequent introduction of formal education among the Tangkhuls led to the replacement of *Longshim* with that of the Christian schools, colleges and hostels in its place. With education a shift in economic focus from agriculture to other economic activities resulted.

7.1.2.3 Tribal level

Christian faith as an integrating force is true in more than one sense. People living in nearby mountains were hunting each other. Today the same visitor proceeds on a courtesy visit or on a mission to share love and friendship. Besides this, Christianity has brought a wider worldview to the Tangkhul people by exposing them to a broad

base worldview beyond their clan or village. Church leaders take part in various Christian (and secular as well) seminars, conferences and have a chance to interact with people from different parts of the world. An important factor in unifying the Tangkhuls is the publication of the Bible and its preaching in the common dialect of the people. As testified by my informants Christian schools, colleges and hostels were responsible for creating and developing to a large extent, a general tribal solidarity and consciousness. Christian liturgy provided another powerful means of creating tribal solidarity. The missionaries tried to develop self-consciousness among the Tangkhuls by textualising the local grammar and publishing a dictionary. Thus the indigenous system of communicating through oral communication was not replaced in written form but the textual has been added to the oral. The Tangkhul language was given written form by using the Roman script. The gift of education from Christian missionaries liberated the people from ignorance and enabled them to take up various employments. They no longer depend only on agriculture for economy. Consequently their economic statuses enhanced. Apart from education, the Church also delved into the welfare of the Tangkhuls. The different Christian denominations made arrangement for performing cultural, literary and different kinds of social activities like helping the poor and needy, medical camps and participation in various social activities.

7.2 Conclusion

Christianity primarily denotes a religious faith aimed at religious conversion of the people through preaching, teaching and doing good works. Christianity has been acting as a catalyst of changes in the realm of ideas and attitudes as testified by my

informants. Encouraging education, ready acceptance to new innovations and quick receptivity to modernism (such as acceptance of modern medicine, enthusiasm to receive education etc.), greater adaptability to new situations, a better civic sense (like stress upon personal cleanliness, hygienic living conditions, advocacy of a more dignified role for women etc.) and higher level of aspirations are some of the points, which may be mentioned in this connection.

Christianity proved beneficial in many ways, yet the spread of Christianity has its negative impact. With conversion to Christianity, the Tangkhuls gave up many ancestral customs which were directly or indirectly linked with animistic beliefs such as life cycle rituals agricultural rituals and festivals, the tradition of ceremonial feast of merit and the practice of ritual head hunting. Conversion also meant giving up several customs such as pipe-smoking and the practice of unmarried men and women spending time together in the youth dormitory (*longshim*). The missionaries especially debated the question of prohibition of rice beer (*zam-khor*) of every native convert on a ground that giving up the beer was a hallmark of Christian status, though *zam-khor* is a nutritious, stable element in the diet of a Tangkhul. Important festivals like *Luirá phanit* continue to be celebrated by the whole Tangkhul community although they have increasingly become secular and are seen as marker of group identity. Today the most visible landmark in Ukhrul town in particular and Tangkhul villages in general is not the monoliths or the men's houses (*longshim*) but Church buildings and bell towers and roofs of which glint in the morning sun. Bemoaning the demise of bygone culture is a wrong approach. It is

definitely more rewarding to turn to the present and monitor the process of change in an effort to attain new insight.

Christianity plays a significant role in the daily life of Tangkhul Christian and has contributed to the community's development in the field of education, health care and literature prior to the present day governmental (state and central) efforts and therefore it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity to the Tangkhuls.