CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The research undertaken in this study has been mainly to examine the coming of the American Baptist missionaries into the Naga Hills and the subsequent spread of Christianity during the nineteenth century. It is also an attempt to determine the extend to which the American Baptist Missionaries activities have influenced the Nagas particularly the Lotha Naga women through the introduction of Christianity and education. This has been done by studying the pre-Christian Naga society on one hand, and on the other hand by doing a research on the work of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in Naga Hills of North East India during the nineteenth century.

The entire study is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, Pre-colonial Lotha Naga society and the role of Lotha Naga women have been examined briefly. The second chapter discusses the history of American Baptist Missionary and their views about Lotha Naga women. The third chapter examines the female education, and the fourth chapter dealt with missionaries endeavor on healthcare. And the fifth and sixth chapter examines the traditional Lotha Naga marriage system and its replacement with Christian marriage system, changed on cultural values, dress, material aspects etc and the empowerment.

Through this study, it is clearly seen that, there has been some progress in the status of Lotha Naga women in the society. It cannot be denied that, there was free mixing of both the sexes in Lotha Naga society. However, this cannot be the ‘determining factor’ to argue in favor of women’s equal status, because though
women were considered powerful and active this did not guaranteed women’s participation in important socio-religious and political functions.

An important finding of the study is that, women in many ways, if not all, were equal to men but their rights were few and male dominance was stressed in words and deeds. The applications of customary laws were stricter towards female, any customary laws or regulations had to be strictly observed very carefully, particularly by women. In other words, applications of customary laws were more favorable towards men. Lotha Naga women seemed to have certain degree of freedom in pre-Christian Naga society as one could see from the various customs still practiced in the present Naga society.

The Lotha Naga women belonged to the inner domain of the society; therefore, the missionaries gave their first priorities to influence them. However influencing the women were not an easy task, therefore the male missionaries mostly involved their wives and single lady to educate the Naga women. Thus, wives of missionaries and single women missionaries did the job of exploring the inner domain of the society where men were restricted to influence the tribal women to their new ideas and religion. It is to be clearly noted here that, the wives were not considered as missionaries but they were simply referred to as the wives of so and so. They were invisible workers, though their contributions were quite indispensable. However, we have seen that right from the beginning, they have worked hand in hand along with their husbands. Wives of missionaries shared their husband’s burden with equal responsibility and dedication. No doubt, they remained ‘invisible workers’ through out their stay in the Naga Hills.

With the formation of Women Baptist Foreign Mission Society, both in the East and the west, the women missionaries both married and single could insist on the identity as missionaries, and not merely as wives. The Women Baptist Foreign
Mission Society (WBFMS) recognized the importance of women's work by women. This eventually led to the coming of more women missionaries to North East India in the nineteenth century. This new development became reflected in their missionary activities and programmes they emphasized. They were more concern in women education, evangelism, literary work and Medical mission.

Right from the very beginning education was the primary concern of the Christian missionaries. They realized that without an educated constituency and trained leadership there was no hope of building a permanent Christian community. This led to the opening of mission schools in most of the Naga villages with a real motive of training the natives to spread the new gospel. There is no doubt about the fact that Christian mission had not only given an early start to the process of educating women. Firstly, education was used by the Missionaries as a means of introducing women to Christianity and thereby to a new scheme of life based on monogamy, economic equality, and more modernistic way of living and thinking. Secondly, the purpose of opening the training school for girls was to train leaders for women group in the church, and to help in the establishment of Christian homes, and to make economically backward girls independent and self supporting.

The Christian missionaries thus, introduced both formal and informal education. This led to the opening of Mission schools for both male and females in Naga Hills. In 1878, Mary Mead Clark established schools for girls in Ao Naga area. This was the first formal school for children of either gender in Nagaland. Mrs. Howard Houston opened the first training school for Lotha Naga girls at Vankhosung in 1951.

The missionaries saw education as the main instrument for uplifting the status of women in the society. As they continued to concentrate on education of women, we can perceive a shift of emphasis. Firstly, the pioneers introduced education to girls to prepare them to be wives for their converts. Secondly, the motive behind
the introduction of non-formal education was to provide economically backward girls with a means of livelihood. The missionaries started to aspire in the women and girls a profession that was more than being housewives. Thus, it led to the shifting of humanitarian developments, and thereby began to send girls for higher and professional education.

Other areas in which the missionaries made important contribution was healthcare. From the beginning of their missions in the Naga Hills, the American Baptist missionaries realized the need of medical aid to the sufferings was inevitable; for no one who has came to this land could fail to see this compelling need which is still so evident. The advance of medical science in the west and the increased attention paid to matters of hygiene tended to make the Missions more conscious of the need for medical service in India generally. It was also felt that such much needed aid should be sent to mission fields and the best available healing methods should go hand in hand and supplement the preaching of the Gospel by word and thus fulfill the command of Christ: "Go Preach the Gospel and heal the sick". Therefore, the missionaries started to take the medical mission very seriously; it was in fact a response to the prevalence of illness due to unhygienic living conditions.

As there were no regular medical missionaries for the Nagas, the Christian missionaries and wives of missionaries who had little knowledge of medicines took the responsibility and burden to work for the healthcare of the people. Without any doubt, we can say that, the medical works of the Christian missionaries to a great extended brought significant result. The new converts became cleaner, hygienic, more balanced and better lifestyle; this eventually minimized the sickness and diseases. In our study it is found that, the people interpreted the success of the missionaries and convert to Christianity in healing,
meant that they had a power over the evil spirits. Thus, it is very much true that, through the medical works many hearts were won to Christianity.

The Christian church has always taken a rigid stand against divorce and enforces a divorce Canon in which it endeavors to incorporate Christ’s teachings to the effect that no man should put away his wife except for adultery, and (with reference to the indissolubility of marriage) “what God has joined together, let no man put as under”. Marriage is therefore believed to be a sacrament which cannot be set aside by earthly powers if once performed by a priest. The Christian missionaries preached that marriage should be sacred, holy and should be solemnized in the church. By going through the missionaries’ reports, however, it was found that, even the new convert Christians object to the introduction of government marriage. It was reported that, only one Christian marriage was registered during the time of the first missionary in Naga Hills.

As the Naga Hills remained excluded areas, any Acts or Laws passed by British Government in India remained inapplicable to the Nagas. Therefore, the Christian missionaries adopted their own Acts and Laws and applied it to the new converts, but those were not recognized by the British government.

Customary laws have a direct bearing on the Pre-Christian Lotha Naga marriage system. The importance and significance of marriage has not been altered much due to Christianity. Although no such Act has been passed in regard to the Naga Christian marriage, however, with the spread of Christianity traditional marriage was replaced by Christian, but the basic norms remained the same, customs and elaborate practices associated with marriages were simplified, and marriage ceremonies became less elaborate. Pre-Christian marriage was extensively elaborate and it involved a lot of rituals and ceremonies. It is found that, the importance and significance of marriage has not been altered due to Christianity.
Though the present marriage system is performed according to the Christian marriage system, it is not totally Christian or totally traditional marriage. We find that the Christian marriage and traditional marriage go hand in hand. In other words, it is a combination of Christian marriage and traditional marriage. Though the present Christian marriage system does not involve elaborate rituals and proceedings, it still involves the observance of the traditional customs such as the bride price 'Hanlam' (a big pig given to the bride family by the groom family), marriage within the same clan, community feasts etc. Thus we find that, though the traditional marriage system were replaced by Christian marriage, the basic modes remained the same, customs and elaborate practices associated with marriages were simplified, and marriage ceremonies became less elaborate.

It is true that the Christian missionaries and the subsequent spread of modern education have brought some positive social changes in Naga society. They made important contributions in the field of literature, the linguistic diversity was reduced, and a sense of solidarity and unity among the diverse Naga groups emerged. But there was a reverse aspect of Christianity in Nagaland. Perhaps it might have been true that, the Christian missionaries had no intention to destroy the Naga cultures. But they failed to differentiate the socio-cultural aspect and religious aspect of the life and culture of the Nagas. Therefore they started to interfere in the social and cultural practices of the Nagas to a far greater extent than the British Government did. They saw the Na'ga way of life from their own European perspectives as culturally inferior, intellectually backward, and religiously superstitious. Thus without in depth understanding of the Naga culture, the missionaries put to a stop several Naga cultures which they considered as heathen practices and unchristian. Some Christian rituals and rites should have been devised to replace the old ones, but the Nagas simply copied the western form of worship, way of life, living, dress etc. Practically the Christian missionaries called for total transformation. From the study it was found that, the
early Naga converts had to wear Assamese cloths, while the latter converts wore European dress. In other words, it can be said that, the traditional dresses were completely replaced by western dresses. One important finding is that, some Naga girls who after spending sometime in the mission schools when returned to their native villages refused to demean themselves by working in the fields and gradually started to show aversion towards their own cultures. This led to the decay and eventual disappearance of several Naga cultures and traditions.

The process of opening up the hills also eroded some of the most fundamental institutions of the villages-the institutionalized warfare and the dormitory system. The advent of the missionaries with strict doctrinal teachings by the Baptist missionaries of not allowing the new converts to sleep in the dormitory curbed the drinking bouts and the feast of merits. The price of this discipline was the disappearance of dormitories (Morung) in the Christian villages.

As discussed, the status of women in Lotha Naga society, in a sense enjoyed a better freedom in contrast to their counterpart in other parts of India. No doubt, theoretically there was no discrimination against women in the society. However, there was no empowerment for women in the society. Hence, it became convinced that the key to the emancipation of women lay in equalization of educational opportunities. According to the understanding of the Christian missionaries, empowerment means imparting education to the women folk, for it was believed that, by imparting modern education it would definitely change their status in the society.

Despite of so much obstacles and difficulties the missionaries put great effort to educate the women. And in due course the Lotha Naga women became enthusiastic about education and a number of girls become educated by the 1950’s. Hence the education of women undertaken by the missionaries brought
about significant changes particularly on women. It successfully counteracted the prevailing view prohibiting the education of women. Many changes were brought to women’s lives by education. Education provided women with opportunities for leadership which they had been previously denied, being debarred from taking a leading role in public.

Through the fellowships and women organizations established by the women missionaries and missionaries’ wives, Lotha Naga women were immensely benefited. It empowered and gave leadership role to the women. Thus, wives of missionaries and women missionaries who came and worked in Naga areas had left great impact upon the Lotha Naga Women too.

An important finding of this study is that, the Christian women were the first to enter the field of education and employment as nurses, doctors or teachers. The educated women were given jobs in mission schools, bible schools, offices, hospitals etc. Thus, the employment of women particularly of the educated Christian women has given them higher status which was seldom enjoyed by their ancestors. Finally they felt themselves “Free” or “Emancipated”. Girls who were trained at mission hospitals had become an asset to the society. They served the people in a most acceptable fashion. And some married Christian workers started to assist in the educational ministry.

The introduction of formal and vocational education to the female came as a great boon to the empowerment of women, as it provided economically backward girls with a means of livelihood. Further if we glanced through the History of women Education in Naga Hills, it becomes clear that pioneering work was done by both wives of missionaries and women missionaries. This aspect could perhaps be attributed to the women missionaries for uplifting the status of Lotha Naga women in North East India. In this aspect we may say that, the Christian missionaries were
the first to emphasis on the role of education through formal and non-formal in equipping women to build a new social order. The study thus reveals that, missionaries endeavor on Lotha Naga women did not go in vain. It brought significant changes in the lives of women; the Christian Missionaries have played the roles as ‘agents of change’ in the transformation of the Lotha Naga women in North East India.

By studying the various aspects of Lotha Naga society before and after the arrival of the missionaries, it is possible to infer that missionary influence contributed a major share to the changes and development in the Lotha Naga society. There were many facets of Naga society and culture, where changes and new outlook were attributed directly to the missionaries. Through the fellowships and women organization established by the women missionaries and missionaries’ wives, Lotha Naga women were immensely benefited. It empowered and gave leadership role to the women. Thus, the Christian missionaries particularly, the women missionaries who came and worked in Naga areas had left great impact upon the Lotha Naga women too.