CHAPTER 5

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY

When a group of people following a particular kind of religion is introduced to a new religion and a new set of ethics, cultural changes follow. That group of people will have to conform to principles regarded as right and legitimate in the new religion. The Lotha traditional beliefs, values and customs underwent tremendous changes as a result of coming into contact with Christianity. The influence of the American Baptist missionaries was a major catalyst for the metamorphosis in the Lotha society and culture. The impact of the missionaries on the Lothas lay mainly in the sphere of religion, social practices, education, medicine, cleanliness, health and sanitation, building of character and the development of self reliance etc. The changes which were brought by the missionaries were a direct consequence of the nature of the Christian faith they taught. At the same time, their attitude to the traditional culture was greatly responsible for rejecting some elements of culture and for retaining others. The present chapter will attempt to examine the above mentioned areas of impact.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

To understand the extent of the impact of Christianity on the Lothas, it is pertinent to know something about the region’s political History. Understanding this aspect will also help to analyze as to whether the cultural impacts would have occurred among the Lothas even without the presence of the missionaries, that is, only through the new administration and the developments brought about by the British rule in the area. Here, one cannot ignore the fact
that with the coming of British rule better communication was introduced, opening up the hitherto isolated Lotha villages. With the opening of the area, outsiders came which led to improvement in the prospect of trade and enhancement in economic livelihood. There was also greater mobility of the people and learning of new ideas. But it can be argued that the deeper and more lasting impact on the life and culture of the Lothas was affected by the Christian missionaries.

Long before the advent of the British, the Nagas had organized themselves under the political systems of their own which had been the natural outcome of their social evolution. Two distinctly different types of system of governance had been evolved – democratic system in the clan-based village societies controlled by the village council, and autocratic system of chieftainship controlled by the village chief. The Lothas, unlike some other Naga tribes like the Semas and Konyaks, evolved a democratic system of governance. Politically, the Lotha region was never ruled by any foreign power nor was never a part of the Indian Empire. In their traditional polity, there was no ruler or chief. Their traditional political system was not institutionalized beyond the village boundaries. Each village was an independent unit in the tribe.

The Lothas governed themselves by a set of unwritten Laws known as the ‘Pyimtsu Motsui Shikhu.’ (Customary Laws). (Ngullie, 1993:16). These customary laws were strictly enforced by a council formed by the elderly men of the village called ‘Tongti Chochang’. The Pvuti (Priest) also occupied important position in the society. However they did not recognized any sovereign power at a higher level. The different villages maintained hostile relations because of the practice of Head hunting. With such a set-up, the Lothas remain in
cultural isolation from the rest of the world for centuries, except for sporadic contact with the plains of Assam for trade purpose. There was no money but goods were bartered.

The geographical isolation of the Lothas was broken by the advent of the British in the Lotha area. As early as 1874, for further extension of political control to both the western and eastern tribes, two survey parties were dispatched “With the set objectives of surveying the areas as much as possible, to explore the resources with a view to ascertain its natural production, to observe the customs, manner and institutions of the tribes, to cultivate friendly relations with the tribes of the interior areas, and to locate a permanent site for the headquarters of the Naga Hills agency”. (Sema, 1992:16). British survey officer Captain Butler reached the Lotha area in December 1875. At Pangti village, Butler was taken by surprise by the villagers and was injured. He was removed to Golaghat for treatment but succumbed to his wound after a few days. In retaliation the British Government burnt Pangti village. (Pongener, 2011:50). The frequent harassment given by the Lothas bringing about John Butler’s death, compelled the Government to establish a regular administration in Lotha area. Prompt and decisive action was taken on the proposal and Wokha sub- Division of Naga Hills District was started in the year 1876. Wokha was occupied as the district head quarter and buildings for that and a garrison were raised. Roads were built. Contacts with the Lotha Villages were made. Formal announcement about the introduction of administration was made and house tax was enforced. Thus, the modern history of the Lothas started when the Wokha Sub- Division of the Naga Hills District was constituted. (Ghosh, 1979:23)

Modern administration was introduced by the British in the district after the creation of the Sub- Division. The British followed a two- tiered system to administer the districts, viz, the village unit and the district unit. The village units were headed by the Goanburas (G.B), responsible for maintenance of law and order. Besides, the institution of the Do- Bhasi (D.B) was introduced. He was the interpreter or translator. A sub- divisional officer was appointed
to head the sub-divisions and at the apex of the district administration was the Deputy Commissioner. He was responsible to the Governor of Assam, who was the agent to the Governor General of India. (Sema, 1992: 128). The same administrative arrangement remained intact throughout the colonial administration of Naga Hills from 1881 to 1947. Here it may be noted that the British introduced no significant basic changes in the administration of the Nagas. They were mostly left to continue to rule and administer their villages according to their respective customs and tradition. The British were satisfied with the maintenance of law and order, collection of annual house tax and guiding of the general administration of the district at the supervisory level thus leaving the responsibility of the actual day to day administration to the Goanburas.

Frederick. S. Downs hold the British administration as the primary agent of cultural change in the Naga hills, as he opines, “ British anthropologists argues for the preservation of traditional cultures of the tribes, but ironically, the British administration itself had initiated the process of cultural change among the Nagas. (1994:128). He identified the components of the intrusions that brought about the changes and challenged the traditional socio-cultural structures as follows; “ The subjection of the tribes to an external political authority for the first time in their history, the introduction of an alien administrative and judicial system that significantly undermined the authority of the traditional system and imposed entirely new principles of authority and jurisprudence; the introduction of a money economy to replace barter and consumer items such as mill cloth and kerosene lanterns, thus undermining the largely self-sufficient economy of the tribal areas; establishment of modern communications, including a postal system, roads and new forms of transport; bringing in a number of outsiders- administrators, clerks, soldiers, merchants, technicians and missionaries- who provided new lifestyle models, particularly in the town areas that grew up around the administrative centers; and the imposition of laws that seriously affected traditional
institution.”. (1994:215). According to Downs, in highly integrated tribal societies, these intrusions created socio-cultural trauma and Christianity provided an adaptive spirit to cope with the drastic changes.

However, Piketo Sema, himself a Naga author avers that “The colonial administration made no significant conscious efforts to introduce western culture in Naga Hills, and its influence on the people remained only at the superficial level without disturbing the cultural current of the Nagas”. (1992:86) The British adopted the system of native administration which would suit local tastes and at the same time be conducive to the maintenance of Law and order among the tribes. In other words, the British did not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of the Nagas nor try to administer them on the European model. Accordingly they reinforced traditional form of administration which well-suited the peculiar conditions of its people and society”. (Sema, 1992:29). The British rule did not in any way seriously affect the basic social structure of the Nagas. It remained traditional in character and content. Almost all the Naga theological writers are agreed with the view of Furer-Haimendorf that ‘the more closer and intimate contact with the people which was affected by missionary enterprise- through preaching of the gospel and schooling not only proselytized the Nagas, but also interrupted the flow of their indigenous culture as well”. (1936: 46).

The British administration in the Naga Hills followed non-intervention policy. As the above discussion reveals, they did not attempt to change the culture of the Nagas, rather they wanted continuity in their culture. The purpose for such approach was perhaps the modernistic concept of evolution. The British considered the Naga Culture as “Primitive” or “Savage”. They came with the colonialist concept of the “White man’s burden” to civilize these primitive tribes. However, they wanted to bring about this through “Evolution” rather than “Revolution”. For the British, the Nagas were “primitive” and “uncivilized”, and their mission
was to civilize them. They saw the changes taking place and wanted to slow the process in order to prevent an abrupt cultural dislocation. (Lotha, 2007:44). As far as the British were concerned, if the “primitive” and “savage” Nagas were to be of any use to them, they had to be civilized first. In this attempt, they brought Christian missions and the schools. Abraham Lotha articulates, “What the British didn’t realize was that by introducing Christianity they unleashed a force that would not only counter their efforts to preserve a “pristine” Naga culture but also expedite a radical change in the Naga society. Christian missionaries followed the policy of civilization by revolution. Everything Naga was considered heathen and was condemned and the missionaries instilled in the converts a negative attitude towards Naga culture”. (2007:46).

It was the coming of missionaries which made the change revolutionary. Every aspect of the people’s life had been touched by change—social, cultural and religion. A number of advantages also came with Christianity. As this religion came along with education, the life of the people had been uplifted to the present standard. With the advent of Christianity and western education, transformation in social life became inevitable. The converts abandoned their former religious rites, beliefs and rituals, accepting Christian teachings and Christian ways and collaborations.

The impact of Christianity on the Lothas should be seen as a whole rather than in denominational segments. However, it cannot be ignored that it was the American Baptist who made a lasting impact on the Lothas because even after the departure of the British and the coming of other denominations to their area, the Lothas seems to have remained uninfluenced and are predominantly Baptist Christians even today. The KBES records that by 2012, 95% of the Lothas are Christians out of which 85% are Baptists. (NBCC Platinum jubilee, 2012:93). The American Baptist missionaries made their impact through evangelistic work, education and medical relief work. All these factors in turn led to change in lifestyle.
Education and development of their language and literature also provided to the Lothas a sense of identity. In the process of carrying out the above said works, they also left a deep impact on the folk lore and culture of the Lothas. To these aspects of impact I will now turn.

EDUCATION

Education ranks as the most important contribution of the Christian missionaries to the Lothas. Socio-cultural transformation among the people could not take place without education. A new outlook on the world can come about only through literacy and through the contact with the outside world that schools can provide. The educational institutions served as places where new generations could master the skills needed in order to cope with the new demands and new situation created after the opening up of the area through new administration. The initial object of imparting education was to promote proselytization among the heathen tribe but the process had resulted in opening to the hitherto secluded Lothas all the wide horizons of knowledge through education. Christian missionaries introduced school education on the understanding that unless the local people knew the basic art of reading and writing, the proclamation of the gospel would not have produced effective results. Thus education was started as a means for evangelization.

The Lotha oral tradition says that they had a script written on dried animal skin which was carried by their forefathers during migration. Written on such skin it was convenient enough for the purpose of rolling. But as this script was not kept under proper custody, time came when it was eaten by a dog. (Ghosh, 1979:31). Myths, notwithstanding, the credit goes to the missionaries who introduced the Roman alphabet and phonetic adjustments made to suit the Lotha language. With the birth of a script to the language, the foundation for education of the Lothas was laid. The process of education of the Lothas was thus a direct contribution of
the missionaries. The Rev. Dr. Witter who initiated the process of the Lotha education can rightly be considered as the father of Lotha education. It was he who brought a script to the language and whose vision and policies began the process of formal education among the Lothas. The many initial problems confronting the missionaries in the field of education were met and overcome with tact and perseverance. There was formidable opposition from the Lotha animists when it became evident that the missionary teaching was adversely influencing the students and eroded the Lotha traditional values. However with their demonstrated dedication and gospel of love, the missionary education attracted the people gradually. It resulted in inculcating discipline, self-reliance and cleanliness. Education also promoted building of personality and leadership in every sphere of the Lotha society—religious, political and professional. Education has enabled the Lothas to know more about others as well as themselves.

Education imparted by the missionaries had its impacts on the status of women and children too. For the children, education was a major breakthrough from the ill clad and unhygienic lives their earlier generation led. The children were better looked after in the areas where schools have been run. Children became more independent, ambitious and well-mannered too. The Christian women, who received education and skill developing trainings under the Christian missionaries, began to supplement their incomes by means of small trade such as stitching, knitting, tailoring, basket weaving etc,. These women had greater air of dignity and self-respect about them than the non-Christian women. In 1951, Mrs. Houston started a women training school at Vankhosung Mission Center. This school was opened with the objective of teaching the bible, songs, and also to develop leadership. The Lotha women were taught not only how to read and write but also skills such as sewing, knitting and tailoring. It was an opportunity given to the women to uplift their social and economic life in the family, as also in the society. They began to nurture new ideas about pattern of childcare
and house-keeping. With increase in the number of educated women and new occupation, there came ideational independence for women too. An attitude towards domesticity as a virtue came about when less attention was placed on agriculture and more on the education of children. Women and children were taught to cook, clean, and minimize the use of water while achieving maximum cleanliness. The Lothas have been slow to send their girls to mission hospitals for nurses training. However with the initiation of the Houston's, the first Lotha girl was sent to Jorhat and another in Kohima.

Thus, education brought about advancement and order that resulted in a reworking of the perception of ‘hygiene’ and ‘health’ among the Lothas. Through education, cleanliness and health care improved considerably. Through the mission schools, a group of intelligentsia emerged among the Lothas who in turn contributed much to the social upliftment of the tribe. Besides, concepts like nation, sovereignty and independence became popular among the tribe. No education is worth the name which does not inculcate the qualities necessary for living graciously, harmoniously and efficiently with one’s fellow men. Amongst the qualities gained through the modern education given by the missionaries by the Lothas are discipline, cooperation, social sensitiveness and tolerance. All these had in turn played a special part in the humanizing and socializing of the people’s personality.

A great debt is owed to the pioneering efforts of Dr and Mrs Witter who started the tradition of blending mission and school. They left behind a tradition which was followed by the local churches, making academic education as one of the hallmarks of the Churches. Many of the Lotha churches are now attached with schools.
LITERATURE

The American Baptists missionaries contributed to the development of Lotha literature. Dr. Witter was the first to reduce the Lotha language to writing. In 1888, Dr. Witter prepared the Lotha primer and a phrase book. In the same year the “An outline Grammar of the Lotha Naga Language with vocabulary and illustrative sentences” was printed in Calcutta. (Murry, 2003:24). Dr. Witter also translated nine hymns and the first catechism, excluding the Lord’s prayer into the Lotha language. The translation of the New Testament also started.

Besides Dr. Witter, other missionaries also helped in the development of literature in the Lotha language. The Rev. S. A Perrine completed the Lotha Primer, Arithmetic, English-Lotha vocabulary and gospel of Mathew in Lotha by 1905. By 1927, Rev. Longwell reported the completion of the gospel of Mark and a hymn book with 115 hymns. (Murry, ed 1979:76). Local converts helped in the translation works. Shanjamo, the first Naga to visit the USA in 1905 was well versed in English, Assamese and Ao besides his mother tongue. He translated several gospel literatures and contributed in the preparation of the ‘outline grammar’ of the Lotha dialect. Chumdemo and Ashio helped in the preparation of the first edition of the New Testament which was printed in 1946. In 1950, 300 copies of the New Testament were reprinted by Mrs. Houston. The hymnal was also revised and reprinted by Mrs Houston in 1951. During the time of Rev. Tanquist, the four gospels of Mathew, mark, Luke and John was edited and 3000 copies printed in 1953.

The missionaries provided theological education and training to Local people so that they could assume leadership and evangelical works themselves. After the departure of the Houstons, the Lothas themselves carried on efficiently the task of evangelization of the Lothas, so also in the development of Lotha literature. The educated Lothas organized the Lotha language and Literature committee. It concerns itself for the development of the
language and for that mainly devoted itself to the translation of the religious scriptures. Other short stories from the Bible were also translated. Mr. Tssidenshio Tsanglao, the first graduate in Theology from the Lotha tribe took up the task of translation of the Old Testament. The entire New Testament was translated by Rev. Ellis Murry. In 1968, the Lotha Bible consisting of both the Old and New Testaments was brought out. In 1967, at the request of the Lotha Churches Association, Dr. L. M. Murry prepared a hymnal containing about 300 hymns. Mr. N. L. Kinghen, Rev. Merithung Mozhu and Rev. Ahamo Patton contributed a lot in the development of literature of the Lothas.

It may be noted that the first educated Lothas who did pioneering works towards the awakening of the tribe through education were Christian converts or whose parents were the earliest converts. Dr. Motsuo of Okotso Village was the son of the Rilumo Ngulli, one of the first Christian converts among the Lothas. He was the first Matriculate and Doctor among the Lothas. He helped in the translation of four Gospels into Lotha. He also translated the Aesop’s Fables into Lotha. (Kikon, 1993:44). By giving a script to a hitherto unwritten language had brought about development of literature, which in turn united the people through a common language. This created greater unity and solidarity among them. Thus education and literature widened the world view of the Lothas, and T. Kikon, called this period from the 1880s to 1950 as the “Age of awakening” among the Lothas.

LIFE STYLE

The American Baptist Missionaries belong to the protestant puritan evangelicalism of the 19th century which emphasized on Christianity as a life style. They focused on transformed life for salvation. Certain standard of conduct was expected to be maintained to become Christians, and the converts themselves understood Christianity as a different way of
life. Areas in which ‘Christian’ standards affected life-style included such things as opposition to the use of intoxicants, stress upon hygienic living conditions, advocacy of a more prominent and dignified role for women, and opposition to intra-tribal warfare and head hunting and the various institutions such as Morung that supported these practices. (Downs, 1994:148).

There was an improvement in the very appearance of the Lothas who came under the influence of Christianity. John Wesley’s maxim, cleanliness as a virtue next to Godliness was adopted by the Christian converts, not to suggest that one was ungodly if unclean, but that those who were seen as ‘neat’ and ‘tidy’ were also seen to be polite, responsible and orderly and, in a very generalized way, to be associated with godliness. Lack of sanitation and unhygienic living conditions naturally caused diseases and illness, which the people then attributed to an evil spirit troubling them. The idea of cleanliness for healthy living was inculcated which gave their society a sense of order. In cleaning dirt, an attempt is being made to control the environment positively. For instance, by keeping the utensils, home and surrounding clean and using clean, boiled water to keep diseases off, the new system is seen as orderly, an elevation of personal and collective hygiene and therefore ‘advancement’ from the previous life of disease and disorder. The Christian missionaries taught the Lothas inexpensive method of personal hygiene through regular bath, keeping oneself clean, wearing washed and pressed clothes, especially on Sunday church services. Rinsing of mouth was occasional, neither was the body cleaned by bathing, the hair combed or washed, nor were the nails trimmed regularly. The missionaries taught cleanliness of person and surrounding. They were also taught to boil and disinfect drinking water. Their dress also underwent a change. The indigenous costumes were gradually replaced by western clothing which perhaps was more practical.
The Rev and Mrs. Houston were the next full time missionaries assigned to the Lothas after the Dr and Mrs Witter left. They lived with the lothas for five years between 1947-53. They made the following observation about the diet of the Lothas: “The Lothas can’t remember a time when the rains failed. Their fields are fruitful giving them rice, corn, millet and vegetables and fruits the year around, oranges, pineapples, bananas, mustard leaves, potatoes, beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, garlic and onions as well as other vegetables. From the jungle they get wild fruits, berries, nuts, edible leaves and roots. When there are no fresh vegetables they have their sour bamboo shoots and ‘stinking’ lentils along with dried fish and meat. They have their own cows, pigs, chickens, goats and often shoot or trap wild animals and birds. But although they have all this they still suffer from many sicknesses because the rice is only half cooked, the curry is filled with red hot chillies, the dishes and cooking utensils are not washed properly, unboiled water is poured into the tea and the pigs and chickens are right at home around the open fire in the dark windowless kitchens”. (1987:15).

The importance of a healthy diet was explained and inculcated to the Lothas by the Christian missionaries. Eggs and fowls which were used for the purpose of sacrifices, now were saved for eating. Milk was introduced as a nutritious item of food. The Lotha agriculturists usually take two to three meals a day. Nothing was taken in between except rice beer. There was less drinking of water. The missionaries introduced tea. The missionaries explained the importance of tending vegetable carefully, using manure. Meals were normally eaten with finger. The missionaries not only taught the Lothas to eat with clean fingers but also the use of cutlery and crockery to some of the educated employed and well to do Christians. Importance of cleanliness and sanitation for health was taught to them. Mrs Harriet Houston constantly emphasized it as she taught the women. In the women’ training school held annually, basic lesson in cleanliness, home nursing and child care was given to the Lotha
girls. Harriet later observed that “The Christians are definitely cleaner and healthier than the non Christians”.

Another contribution made by Christianity to the Lotha life-style was in providing a new peaceful relationship among the different villages. As noted earlier, head hunting and warfare was a way of life for the Lothas before the British administration put a ban on it. With the gospel of the good news a new relationship based on love and friendship rather than hostility and warfare was inculcated. Downs noted that “It was essential that a new ideology replaced the old if social disintegration were not to take place. The Christian emphasis upon love for neighbors and enemy alike provided that new ideology”. (1994: 151). Thus, the spread of Christianity and the enlightenment arising out of education gave men a moral outlook with which the old philosophy of life-for-life was incompatible. The practice of head hunting thus died down a natural death.

Among the Lothas the beginning of Christianity in new villages was made due to the works of converts from other villages rather than the foreign missionaries. Rev. Ibonsao, Shanjamo etc were the pioneer Lotha evangelists who went preaching from village to village making first converts in the new villages. The churches and later the Lotha Churches Association played a significant role in establishing fellowship and good will among the hitherto hostile Lotha villages. The absence of any organization, political or otherwise to embrace the whole tribe is already noted. It was the annual meeting of the Associations and the church fellowship which brought together for the first time the representatives and converts of the different Lotha villages. These fostered openness to others and affected their life-style. At present there are 121 villages under the umbrella of the Lotha Baptist churches association (KBES).
Christianity also brought to the Lothas the idea of humanism or in other words new value judgment concerning the worth of the people around them. The Lotha traditional life was guided by superstition and taboos. For instance, they considered people dying of unnatural death as the malice of the evil spirits, and therefore taboo to touch the corpse lest they will be afflicted with nmyok (evil fate). But now with the teachings of Christian love and concern for fellow beings, the converts adopted a new attitude or sense of responsibility towards other people. Therefore, we can say that Christianity liberated the Lothas from their superstitions and fear. They came to understand that the rites and rituals, the superstitions and taboos of the animistic religion were not effective in keeping them from the fear of the malevolent spirits. Christianity and Christ’s power is seen to be greater than the spirits. In other words, the Christian teachings replaced animism. Therefore Christianity not only provided a new material life-style but also gave to the Lothas an adaptive spirit amidst drastic changes ushered through modernization.

MEDICINE

In the traditional tribal world view, religion and illness were inseparable. Illness was due to the displeasure of the spirits. Illness was a religious problem, not a purely physical or scientific one, and much religious practices had been directed towards appeasing the spirits that causes illness. When it became evident that the treatment offered by the missionaries was not only much cheaper than the traditional sacrifices but more effective, the people took it to mean that the religious power of the missionaries was greater than that of the traditional priests. The missionaries began to give simple medical treatment even though they had no formal qualification. The early missionaries were not trained, but gradually pick up a little knowledge of first aid and simple treatment of the most prevalent diseases. The medical
services thus constituted a practical demonstration of the meaning of Christian universalism. The service was provided to all. Moreover, local Christians were encouraged to transcend their traditional narrow loyalties in services to others. In this way, a pagan who does not care for a stranger has concern for his clan and relatives. Seeing better results of modern medicine made them to give up their old method of performing rites in times of sickness. In this way, medical missions had significant influence upon their traditional worldview and superstitions.

Dr. Clark had foreseen the great utility of medical work in furthering the missionary cause, and accordingly he made a special request for a qualified medical missionary. In response, Dr. S. W. Rivenburg came to Molung in 1885, and later shifted to Kohima where medical relief works were carried on side by side with evangelism. The first full-time medical missionary among the Lothas was Dr. Bailey. He was in fact instrumental in the opening of the Christian Medical Centre at Vankhosung for the Lothas. In 1928, Dr. J. R Bailey purchased the present Kyong (Lotha) Baptist Churches Association (KBES) Mission Centre Vankhosung with the purpose of establishing a Medical College and Hospital. On completion of the land deal, he went to Calcutta (Kolkata) to purchase CGI sheet to start the construction works of the proposed Hospital. But unfortunately he died in Calcutta due to food poisoning. However, the Lotha Baptist Association kept the vision of Dr. Bailey alive, and with funds donated by the Churches the Christian Medical Centre was established on 7th March, 1984 as a maiden project of the Kyong (Lotha) Baptist Churches Association.(KBES). (KBES record).

Inspired by the humanitarian approach of the American missionaries the Lotha Association also developed a wider objective of deliver primary healthcare to the remote villages through the network of Churches. This inspiration is an important legacy of the American Baptist missionaries on the Lothas. With the support of the people, in cash and kind, and the Lotha Churches, the Christian Medical centre is still functioning. As mentioned
in the objective, the Hospital continue to provide community healthcare services to all the remote villages through an established Rural Mobile Unit comprising of qualified and expert medical team. This Unit is responsible for taking the healthcare system to the rural areas through the network of Churches under the KBES. For the purpose of implementing this program, Rural Health Centres are attached with all the Churches. The Community Health Promoters (CHP) who are trained in this Medical Centre are assigned the dual task of healthcare provider as well as coordinator to the Rural Mobile Unit Team. The infant mortality rate is alarming in the rural areas. Therefore, emphasize is laid on the immunization of all kinds including Ante and Post Natal care to the rural populace both in the Hospital and through the Community Health Promoters. Thus healthcare system is delivered to the poor and needy people in the remote villages.

Help given to the villagers in the form of medicines was greatly appreciated and it went a long way towards winning their confidence. As Howard and Harriet Houston wrote, “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”. (1987:13). Through the medical relief works, the missionaries won the confidence of the Lothas. The Houstons remembered, “One of the men had broken his arm and his friends had brought him to us for American medicine. It was difficult to persuade him to go on to the government hospital at Wokha to have his arm set because he believed American medicine rubbed on his broken arm would heal it. Although we told the Lothas we were not medical people, still they came 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 mint”. (1987:13). Here, back door meant that the missionaries were not medical doctors but preachers of the good news, and through the practical demonstration of their love and concern
of the people to whom they came to preach the good news, the missionaries had clearly build good will and confidence of the Lothas.

Though the function of the medical mission was primarily physical, yet it had evangelistic aims also. It was the door of approach and often an effective door of approach to the hearts of the patient. Mrs. Harriet Houston recalled “An old lady came to us with a breast cancer and Harriet suggested she go to the mission hospital for treatment. But it was over 100 miles away and the old lady had neither strength nor money to get there. Harriet witnessed to her of the love of Christ for her and she said ‘oh Etsi Eloë, I believe in you’. Harriet carefully told her we could not save her but we were there to point her to Christ who could”. (1987:15).

The relief of suffering was, therefore, regarded as the duty first hand, but the effort to convert the patients was also not neglected. The medical work of the American protestant missionaries was, therefore, one of the most commendable aspects of their activity. It broke down prejudice and dissipitated opposition. The missionaries endeared themselves to the people where they worked. The work of evangelism was aided and Christian principles were disseminated through medical institutions. (Pathak, 1967: 195).

IDENTITY

Before the establishment of British rule in the region, tribal identity was weak in the sense that there was absence of an organization or body which brought together all the villages of the tribe, either for religious or political purpose. There was no organization embracing the whole tribe. As described earlier, each Lotha village was a state in itself. Head hunting and warfare was the order of the day. Therefore, the villages remained in constant hostility toward each other. Frederick .S. Downs has identified four ways in which Christianity has contributed to strengthening a sense of tribal identity in the North East India -
through the creation of a standard language, through its educational work, through its ideology and through its ecclesiastical structures. (1994: PP 206,207). We can discuss in this lines because what is true for the North East region is true for the Lothas too.

When the missionaries arrived at the Lotha area, they did not have a written form of language. The first task of Dr. Witter, the first missionary to the lothas, on arrival was to reduce the language to writing. The object of the missionaries in doing this was evangelization. But it resulted in the creation of a standard language which led to the development of literature in the local language. With the growth of literacy and establishment of schools, the people became conscious of their identity as one people, and also their rights and privileges under an alien rule.

Education widened the mental as well as geographical horizon of the Lothas. The educated ones for the first time came into contact with members from other villages within the same tribe as well as outside with whom, previously they had no contact. The first of these people were the Local converts who later as evangelists began to visit other villages preaching the gospel. Thus Christianity paved the way for the people to come out of their isolation and widened their social interaction and made them aware of their cultural identity. Christianity became the strongest integrating force in their society.

The converts were organized into local churches. In the Lotha area, the first church was established at Okotso village in 1904. By 1922 the Lotha churches was multiplied to 12 churches necessitating the formation of the Lotha Baptist Churches Association. Previously these churches were under the Ao Association, but in 1923 the Kyong Baptist Ekhumkho Sanrhyutsu KBES (The Lotha Baptist churches Association) was formed. From that year onwards meetings were held annually. These church organization or Association was the first to bring together representatives of the whole tribe. It significantly contributed to the strengthening of tribal identity. KBES brought together persons and representatives from the
entire tribe for annual meetings, fellowship and common aspirations. Though its objective was religious, it helped in unifying the tribe.

Politically oriented organization like the Tribal Council Bench and the Lotha Hoho were developed later by the educated Lothas, but the tribal level church organization ie, Kyong Baptist Ekhumkho Sanrhyutsu KBES (The Lotha Baptist Churches Association), provided a much larger and more comprehensive experience of the reality of the unity of the tribe. The women and youth fellowships also brought the people together.

The most important element in Christian ideology was its universalism. The traditional tribal religions had generally been perceived to be relevant mainly to the village or small group of villages. Christianity was proclaimed as relevant to the whole tribe, indeed to all humankind. This universalism was re-enforced by an emphasis on the Christian responsibility for evangelism and service even to members of the tribe who were hostile to them. In fact, the first persons to establish significant positive contacts among villages traditionally hostile towards each other were Christian evangelists, some employed by the missions or by churches but most being volunteers. They were in a very real sense the first agents of tribal solidarity. (Downs, 1994: 34). To this reality expounded by F. S. Downs as tribal ecumenism, Renthy Keitzer adds, “A new consciousness of identity was born in Christ as one people”. (1995: 5).

FOLK LORE

The term ‘folk-lore’ applies to unwritten orally transmitted folk-literature of a people. It includes legends, myths, stories, songs, proverbs, wise sayings and lore, patterns of festivals and dances, superstitions and magical formulas. The term was coined by William J. Thomas (1803- 1885) in 1846 to denote either the above mentioned collected materials or the systematic scientific analysis of the materials collected. (Kumar, 1995: 27).
The Lothas are rich in their folk-lore. They had their own ways of recording, narrating and passing on their history. These were largely done through stories. Every village had a body of tradition which narrated the origin of the clans, the doings of their ancestors and the feasts some of their prominent ancestors hosted etc. while some of the stories were purely local interest some were common to the tribe as a whole. Many stories were narrated during festive occasions when the whole villagers come together. In the absence of written documents, folk tales and oral traditions remain the sole links between the past and the present. Unfortunately, with the missionaries contempt of the animistic practices and folklore, vast treasure is on the verge of vanishing with the passing away of the old generation. The Lotha folk-lore was rooted in their culture and tradition and acculturation has brought a setback for the same. The decline of the *Chumpo* (morung) which used to be the vital centre around which the Lotha Folk lore flourished has adversely affected the Lotha Folk lore.

Very few of the missionaries, and none who worked with the Lothas, made any systematic study of the culture and tradition of the people they had come to evangelize. This was, in part, due to the ethos out of which they had come in America, and partly because of the nature of their training. They came out of the 19th century evangelicalism which was strongly oriented towards bringing about conditions favorable to the establishment of the kingdom of God through social change. They were therefore more interested in changing society than in preserving it. (Roy, 2004:30). With the Lothas, they were more interested in what the people should become than what they had been, more geared towards change rather than looking for elements of continuity with the past.

Their aim was to gain converts who, with education and training in the gospel would become agents of social change. Those who were first converted to Christianity were those who received education and in fact they were the ones who brought great changes in the
socio-cultural and economic life of the Lothas. Because of these reasons, perhaps, none of the foreign missionaries consider it necessary to study the traditional culture in great depth. This change oriented Christianity of the puritan missionaries was most evident in their educational activities. Christianity and education became inseparable. Though Christianity is not per se modernity, the process of modernization was begun by the Christian missionaries with education as the main agency. Moreover, since modernization is born in the west, and the west brought modernization to the Lothas through evangelism and education and new administration, they are the two sides of the same coin.

No doubt the introduction of western music is another important contribution of the missionaries. Music was set in the western tunes and Christian hymns were translated to the Lotha language which was sung in the church services and gatherings. On this music as the base, Lotha music had greatly enriched itself over the years. But, western music resulted in the decline of the traditional folk music. Talking about the decline of the traditional songs and dances, Professor Takatemjen wrote that “Denouncing tribal music and dance as devilish and animistic has done more harm than good. Today hardly any Naga born into Christian home knows Naga Folk music well. It is true that Christian hymns have replaced the Naga music to a certain extent, but it has failed to replace the traditional music which was a natural expression related to real life experience. The Nagas have now embraced the western form of music and yet the fact remains that music too is a vital part of a people’s identity, and it cannot be replaced without damage to the individual and to the society. Dance should be reintroduced as a sort of game for the young and original Naga music should be created so that Christ may be more meaningfully expressed in the culture of the people.” (1990:16). In the same note Abraham Lotha laments, “ask any Naga kid to sing an original Naga song and you will know what I mean. They will know the latest chartbusters of western music but it is highly improbable that they will know any Naga folk song”. (2013:81).
RELIGION AND CULTURE

At the outset it need mention that positive attitude to one’s own and other’s culture are not mutually opposed concepts and, therefore, both can be developed simultaneously and it is always advisable to do so. The positive attitude towards one’s own culture should precede the positive attitude towards other culture and the former should always form the basis for the latter. The problem arises only when one is stressed at the cost of the other, when one’s love for his culture is tainted by his distaste for other’s culture which often is the case everywhere. (Kundu, 1994: 166, 167).

In the early years, the missionaries had an ambivalent attitude towards the Naga indigenous culture. Their dedication to the people was also blended with a strongly critical view of the traditional religion and the various cultural practices with conscious or unconscious feelings of superiority in their relation with the heathen. The American Baptist missionaries were products of the early 19th century when the western nations were vigorously expanding on the globe and western imperialism was in its prime. The feeling of cultural superiority was a by-product of the political supremacy and economic prosperity enjoyed by the western nations which reflected itself in missionary attitude as well. (Pathak, 1967: 77). Dr. Fleming, himself a missionary wrote in his book “Whither Bound in Missions”, “It was in this earlier atmosphere of racial and cultural superiority that modern missions took their rise. It would be surprising, therefore, if the feeling of superiority, so general in the west, had not been reflected in certain missionary attitude. Here and there, it crept into the literature of early missions, taking it for granted that just as the west had only worthy culture, so their religion was the only faith embodying any truth”. (1925: 03). In most
of the reports of the early missionaries, this superiority attitude is reflected by using words like ‘savage’ ‘heathen’ and so on.

The prevalent theology of the period also served to strengthen this attitude among missionaries. It was ardently believed by Christian theologians of this period that those who had not heard the message of Christ and accepted him as their saviour were eternally damned. (Williams, 1941: 60). The missionaries, therefore, sincerely believed that by propagating the Gospel, they were saving the heathen from eternal damnation and thereby, fulfilling a sublime spiritual mission.

From 1870s onwards, a remarkable change came over American protestant thought. This was the regeneration of the individual to that of society through the Christian gospel. In the earlier period the emphasis had been on the salvation of the individual. But by the 1880s, the idea that not only the individual but all of society should be recreated through Christian love and benevolence found concrete expression in American protestant thought. It was emphasized that the teachings of Jesus had a message not only for the individual, but for his whole environment- social, moral and economic. (Pathak, 1967: 93). The increased emphasis on the social aspects of Christianity had its origin in the thinking and activities of the Liberal Theologians of this period. It came to be called the “social Gospel” and is regarded as America’s unique contribution to the great ongoing stream of Christianity. Now the aim of the foreign missionary work was not only the salvation of the individual non-Christian, but the regeneration of society and the Christianization of the whole social order. In short, the aim of the foreign mission was to elevate human society, modify traditional evils and introduce ideals of reform.

Armed with these prevailing ideologies of the age, the American Baptist missionaries came to the Lothas and began the efforts of civilizing and evangelizing the tribe. But we
cannot conclude that Christianity which came along with western culture is good in all aspects of the life of the people. There were certain negative concepts and practices which were a by-product of the new religion. As a result of a western cultured religion, the pattern of thinking and mode of life of the people are being to a great extent westernized. The people, especially the young were began to dislike many of their cultural elements like songs, festivals and dresses etc. Furer-Haimendorf avers, “All the teachings the Mission provides point to a wider, and in the eyes of the young convert, a more desirable world. Seeing his own customs condemned by the missionaries, he learns to despise his own tribe and cultural inheritance”. (1946:54).

In the process of evangelization, the entire cultural set up of the tribe was affected, for among the Lothas religion is so interwined with their everyday life that distinction cannot be made between the sacred and secular. Every dimension of their life is linked with the invisible world of the spirits. As V. K. Nuh expresses, “Culture pervades every aspect of the life of its members. Their food habits, dress, manners, behavior and customs, their concept of time, space and reality are culturally patterned. Tribal religion is a belief expressed culturally. Tribal religion and culture are two faces of the same coin”. (Nuh, 2001: 25 ). British administrators and most of the anthropological writers are agreed that the Christian ban on cultural practices has adversely affected many aspects of the Naga Culture. They pointed out particularly the strict imposition of teetotalism, ban of the Morung life and cultural feasts and festivals.

Traditional religion and the rituals and ceremonies associated with it were condemned as heathen practices by the missionaries, leading to the complete extinction of these practices. “They rejected anything in the traditional culture that they judged to be religious or superstitious. Animal sacrifices and rituals intended to propitiate the spirits were prohibited. There was also a certain suspicion of anything that departed from the rather sober evangelical
understanding of appropriate Christian conduct. Even too much merry making, though innocent of all religious or immoral connotations was suspect. They believe that the life style of Christians and non-Christians should be clearly apparent”. (Downs, 1972:189). Therefore, all heathen festivals and feasts were to be forbidden. One such practice was the Osho (feast of merit) which fulfilled an extremely important socio-religious and economic function in the Lotha society. The Lothas are by nature fond of feasting. For every achievement like good harvest or successful raids they arrange feasts and celebrate the occasion. The celebration of any festival was considered as incomplete without a sumptuous meal. Thus, feasting of the whole community and a feast given by an individual family for the whole village were an important part of the traditional way of life, the means whereby sharing was practiced and friendship was maintained. (Pongener, 2011: 57). The performance of the Osho is the hallmark of social distinction for a Lotha. There are a series of feasts, each one costlier than the preceding one. Each series necessitates the expenditure of large quantities of food-stuffs. For among the Lothas, a man did not gain social prestige by merely possessing wealth, but only by spending it for the benefit of others. Every feast entitles the host to social distinction and increases progressively his standing and position in the community. It also entitles him to wear special dresses and ornament and decorate his house in a particular manner, marking him out from others in the village. (Singh, 1972: 73).

This practice was prohibited by the Christian missionaries and the British administrators for several reasons. The British government saw the celebration of the feast of merit as a motivating factor for headhunting raids (Pongener, 2011:58) because of the system of dancing around the Menkitong (the head tree of the villages where heads of enemies are hung) during celebration. Another reason was the extravagant expenses involved in hosting the feast. The British government saw that hosting of the feasts involved a huge waste of essential resources and thus they discouraged its observance. The missionaries also, on their
part objected to the feast of merit presumably because the animals consumed in their course are not just slaughtered but sacrificed with appropriate invocations of the spirits. (Furer-Haimendorf, 1946:52-53). The practice also contradicts with the missionaries’ rigid enforcement of teetotalism, for the feasts involved much drinking of soko (rice beer) and merry-making. Abraham Lotha writes, “Even though the primary objective of the missionaries was to preach the gospel and win souls, in practice, conversion to Christianity also meant conversion to modernity and western morality, particularly American protestant puritan morality in the case of the Nagas, thus calling for a cultural transformation.” (2013:86). Thus, with the coming of Christianity and onset of modernity, the practice of Osho no longer exists in the Lotha society today in its original form.

Modern Naga writers are agreed that the prohibition of the feasts and festivals, rituals and ceremonies broke the community spirit. The fundamental concern of the Lotha religion with the well being of the community, are expressed through the rites and rituals, feasts and festivals. Furer-Haimendorf opines, “with the community spirit broken, individualism begin to assert itself, and the western idea of pride in the possession of goods, fostered quite unconsciously by the missionaries, replaced the Naga traditional pride in the lavish expenditure of his wealth”. (1946:52-53). The practice of giving feasts provided the Lothas with the incentive to work hard in order to feed the community. But, the abolition of this practice the Lothas began to hoard their wealth and later sell it for profit. The very notion of capitalism in the villages was initiated for the first time by the missionaries.

To the Christian faith was added another factor- formal education which was directly responsible for the disintegration of the Lotha Tradition learning institution, the Chumpo. (Morung or Bachelors’ dormitory). The Lotha Chumpo fulfilled a variety of functions. It served as a guardhouse to warn the villagers in times of war. It was a place where human and animal skulls were kept as relics. It was a meeting place where important decisions relating to
war or peace were taken. It was here that the young boys hear stories and legends told by the old men. The folk songs and tales were handed down from one generation to the other in the *chumpo*. It was also a recreational club for the youth. The members of the *chumpo* were organized into age groups and assigned various works. The boys by performing the duties assigned to them developed a sense of discipline and duty towards his seniors and the community as a whole. An increase in the school enrolment was followed by a decrease in the *chumpo* membership. Soon it was a dying institution and the Lothas lost an important disciplinary institution.

With the decline of the *chumpo* and the feasts and festivals, the Lotha folk lore declined as mentioned earlier. Home industries such as weaving was also affected because the converts now did not require the colorful and richly embroidered traditional shawls because of its association with the traditional religion and culture. For instance, the performance of the *Osho* (Feast of merit) entitles a Lotha to wear a certain shawl called *Phanrubsu* and *Longpensu*. Headhunting, feasts and festival celebrations required the people to don their traditional ornaments and clothes. With Christianity, these cherished possessions like ivory armlets, cowrie beads, head dress and artistically woven shawls were discarded. Beautiful wood carvings which adorned the *Chumpo* also declined. Folk tales, music and dances were forgotten.

The strict enforcement of teetotalism also affected the feasts and festivals because for a Lotha a celebration is incomplete without the *Soko* (rice beer). The Lotha use the term *sho* for drink. There are *Liri sho* which means drinks prepared for harvest, *Yan sho* is drinks prepared for the whole village, *Yinga sho* is the drinks prepared for the age group working company and lichen sho, the drinks prepared sowing seed ritual. The Lotha *Osho* is also the occasion where the whole community is invited to partake in drinking *Soko* (rice beer). (Ngullie, 1994:36-37). Therefore, prohibiting the drinking of rice beer was the main obstacle
to any participation of Christians in village feasts. The custom of eating and drinking together perpetuate community bonding and unity. Moreover, it was a daily part of the diet of the Lothas which refreshes them during hard working days at the Jhum fields. J.P Mills writes, “To deprive a Lotha of his Madhu (Soko) would be like depriving a British workman of both his beer and tea”. (1922:78). Wearing western dress and not drinking rice beer became the markers of becoming Christian. The Lotha Christians were differentiated as ‘Dhorum ekhi’ (people who have accepted religion) and those who have not converted were called Soko eyui, (drinkers of rice beer). So the Lothas who are still persisting in the old religion are identified as “Soko eyui” even if they have stopped brewing and drinking Soko (rice beer) these days.

But one cannot make negative generalization about the missionary attitude towards the traditional cultures. The American Baptist missionaries had prohibited the traditional feasts and festivals and the activities of the Chumpo (Morung) because of their association with the old animistic religion, the sacrifice of animals and the excessive drinking and merry making involved. Most of the feasts and celebrations were also associated with head hunting. According to them, many of the songs and dances were supposed to encourage promiscuity or to celebrate war and headhunting which were immoral by Christian standards. M. M. Clark wrote that, “instead of congregating promiscuously at different houses to sleep at night, singing objectionable songs, telling doubtful stories, and engaging in lewd conversation, these young reformers separated themselves and built a dormitory for their own accommodations in which purity and holiness should reign”. (1907: 138)

However, later writers suggest that the missionaries could have been more selective, affirming those elements within the traditional practices that were innocent of the above problems and ‘Baptize’ them as Christian celebrations. Furer- Haimendorf suggested that some of the old feasts and ceremonies, particularly the agricultural festivals could have been adapted to the new faith, given a new meaning and retained by the Christian missionaries. He
wrote, ‘yet one would think that with a little trouble an institution of an essentially social and economic character could have been re-modeled so as to be compatible with Christian tenets. Were such adjustments impossible, Europe would have long lost all its folk festivals and the Christmas tree would long ago have been condemned as a pagan symbol” (1946:53). In the same note Abraham Lotha suggests, “The majority of Nagas are Christians but the type of Christianity in Nagaland is very alien to the Naga culture. If Christianity is to contribute to the preservation of Naga culture, and more important, if it is to become meaningful, personal and relevant to the Nagas, it must be inculturated”. (2013:78).

Another Naga writer gave the following opinion, “forsaking all the missionaries came to spread the good news. But soon, they saw their task as having become two-fold- to convert and to civilize. The first was a spiritual and religious obligation, the second, a moral duty. Unfortunately, the “civilizing” became more and more immediate. Their priorities became mixed up, and they under-cut their own tremendous contributions to Naga society. The mistake of the early missionaries was that they were in a hurry. In the process, they failed to properly study and to appreciate the Naga way of life. They judged Naga society according to western ethos and only looked at the Naga world from the view point of the cultural environment under which they themselves were brought up. Not surprisingly, Naga cultural practices were seen as ‘uncivilized’ ‘Heathen’ etc, and wanting to give the best to the Naga converts, the ‘civilizing’ process began which led to condemning Naga cultural practices especially in the area of worship. Christianity failed to take root in Naga Culture. ….more than anything else, this effected the new converts in many vital ways. They had to give up most of the things they were taught to value in life, and live a new way, only because things could not be interpreted to them in their cultural context. (Chasie,1999:115).
With the onset of post modernity and globalization, the debate would take on a new meaning. As for perspective, the missionaries were human beings and they in turn made a lot of mistake. It is the turn of the present generation to re-interpret or to re-correct those misgivings by indigenizing Christianity into the society, and not in indigenizing the Missionaries or their western culture into Christianity or the society.