

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Statement of the Problem

The advent of Christianity in Tripura among the Hrangkhawl tribe caused lot of changes both positive and negative. Therefore, the aim of this study is to survey and make a critical evaluation on the impact of Christianity upon the Hrangkhawl people in Tripura

2. Elaboration of the Problem

With the advent of Christianity among the Hrangkhawl tribe in Tripura, many of their traditional beliefs and practices had been changed. On the other hand, certain transformation had been taking place on the life of the Hrangkhawl community. In this research, therefore, an attempt will be made to study both the positive and negative impacts of Christianity among the Hrangkhawl in Tripura.

Moreover, the community is indeed grateful for the positive values rendered by Christianity which led them to beneficial modernization. But there are also some negative impacts of Christianity as it wipe up of the traditional practices and customs of the people that bring in identity crisis. Therefore, this research aim to discover the positive values of the traditional culture and try to install those positive values that could enriched the Gospel. It also tries to discard the irrelevant traditional elements, especially those elements which have no value at the present context church life.

Another area is that among the community the Gospel was proclaimed by various Mission Societies brought the existence of different denominations; thereby disunity exists in the Church life as well as within the society. Therefore, this research also tries to focus on the influence and impact of different denominations among the community.

3. Importance of the Research

The importance of this study may well be explained as follows:

a. The importance of the research is to introduce the origin of the Hrangkhawl tribe and their cultural heritage.

b. The research is also to study the impact of Christianity rendered by the Gospel on the life of the Hrangkhawl people in order to find out the outcome in being a blessing or confusion for the community.

4. Scope and Limitation

Though, the Hrangkhawl tribe is few, they are in various part of the North East India. This thesis will mainly deal with the Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra and Rangamura area in Tripura.

5. Previous Research

Sukhendu Debbarma has written '*Origin and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*' which provides a little information of the Hrangkhawl Christianity. Another book written by Rev. Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols of the Cachar Hill Tribes Synod in Assam* (1998) gives the information on the arrival of

Christian missionaries among the Hrangkhawl tribe in Assam. This unpublished script is very informative but it was distinctively confined only to the people of Assam and left out the Hrangkhawl tribe of Tripura.

6. Method of Research

This thesis will adopt a historical-analytical perspective for its methodology. The study will be both library and empirical research. It will consist of depending on available written data published by the Church, Government and others. They will be observed critically through the process of checking the validity and authenticity of their information. They will also be examined from the perspectives of the Hrangkhawl society in Tripura. An explanation on the role and activities of the New Zealand Baptist Missionaries will be done in the light of the available documents and it will try to do integrity to making an objective analysis.

7. Division of Chapters

The research work is divided into six chapters in which the chapter one dealt with the overall introduction of the studies undertaken.

Chapter Two will examine the historical background of the Hrangkhawl tribes in Tripura. *Chapter Three* will examine the Socio-Cultural and Religion Structure of Hrangkhawl Tribe. *Chapter Four* will examine the Advent of Christianity among the Hrangkhawl in Tripura. *Chapter Five* will examine the impact of Christianity on the life of Hrangkhawl Tribe in their socio-cultural and religious life. And *Chapter Six* is the overall conclusion of the research work.

CHAPTER TWO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HRANGKHWAL TRIBE IN TRIPURA

1. Introduction

In this chapter, the focus will be on the historical background of the Hrangkhawl Tribe in Tripura, bringing about their origin, migration, dialects, clans and kinship.

2. Historical Background of Hrangkhawl

The Hrangkhawls are one of the indigenous tribes inhabited in the North Eastern part of India. They scattered and lived in different states respectively in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

2.1. The Land of Tripura

Traditionally, the origin of the name Tripura was “*Tuipra*” which means “*Lands Adjoining the Water.*”¹ It is one of the small hilly state of the North East India, covering an area of 10,492 km² which lies between 91⁰ 10’ and 92⁰ 22’ East longitude and 22⁰ 56’ and 23⁰ 32’ North latitude. It was surrounded by Bangladesh on the North, West, South and South-East and in the East by Mizoram and Assam States.² The principal mountain ranges of Tripura are *Sakham Tlang*, *Longtarai*, *Athara Mura* and *Bara Mura*.³ The State has a curved strip of land, measuring about 183.5 km in length from Northeast to West, and 112.7 km in width from South to North, with a total population of 3,671,032. Varieties of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers, ferns, and epiphytes were available.

¹ Sukhendu Debbarma, “*Origin and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*” (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996), 20

² “Tripura,” In [http:// www.tripura.nic.in](http://www.tripura.nic.in) (11th July 2011).

³ “Tripura Map,” In <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/tripurath> (11th July 2011)

The State had several diverse ethno-linguistic groups with rich composite cultures namely *Bengali, Tripuris, Jamatias, Reang, Noatia, Koloi, Murasing, Chakma, Halam, Garo, Kuki, Mizo, Mogh, Munda, Oraon, Santhal* and *Uchoi*. Although all the tribes have their own dialect in the State but the official language spoken among the people were *Bengali* and *Kokborok*. Tripura was once an independent Kingdom but later merged with India on the 15th July 1949 by the Merger Tripura Agreement and on 21st January 1972 attained a full-fledged Statehood with Agartala as the capital city of the State. The State was well connected with the rest of the country by air, road and railways.⁴

2.2. Origin of Hrangkhawl Tribe

The word “*Hrangkhawl*” or “*Hrangkhol*” is a combination of two words “*Hrang*” and “*Khawl*” where the first word “*Hrang*” implies ‘*Courageous Warrior*’ and “*Khawl*” imply ‘*To Win over Enemies*.’⁵ With this combination, it can be translated as “a courageous warrior who defeated their enemy.” Another meaning was that the Hrangkhawls were the people who are courageous than any other tribes. They were known as “*Ralmisak*” which means the people who first face the enemy in the battlefield.⁶

In term of race descendant, the Hrangkhawl people claim that they belong to the Mongoloid descent. They are one of the racial groups of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo racial stocks.⁷ According to the oral tradition of the Hrangkhawl, the existence of human beings

⁴ “Tripura” in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripura>, (20th July 2011).

⁵ Sumchonlal Hrangkhol, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols of the Cachar Hill Tribes Synod in Assam*, unpublished manuscript (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 1998), 5.

⁶ Interview from Henry Hrangkhawl, Zion Hills, West Tripura, on 25th June, 2011.

⁷ Sumchonlal Hrangkhol, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols...*, 5.

(munusi or manmasi) originated from a huge cave or a hole called “*Khurpuitabum*” which is located somewhere in China (as some historians asserted). This place is also known as ‘Sinlung’ or ‘Chhinlung.’ This had close similarity with the oral traditions of China that describes on around 750 AD,⁸ there was a Prince named Chhinlung who once disagree with his father on some official matter, then fled with many peoples who happen to be his supporters and established a village named “*Awksatang*” in Burma (Myanmar). Gradually they flourished and multiplied in numbers but later when he died, his people dispersed in different groups. So, these people who came out from that village were called Chhinlung people. Therefore, these two traditions seem to have close connection in tracing out the past history of the Hrangkhawl tribe.

2.3. Migration and Settlement

In term of migration and settlement, the Hrangkhawl tribe migrated from one place to another due to the pressure they faced against the strong clans or in search of fertile land for cultivation. Moreover shifting cultivation was their main occupations. For many centuries, the tribe had migrated to Burma but later returned to North-East India through China. Tradition says that the tribes after settling somewhere in Burma, they migrated to Mizoram (Lushai Hills), Manipur, Tripura and Assam.⁹

According to the tradition, the tribes after leaving Burma, they entered Mizoram (the Lushai Hills) and settled in Champhai for a long time before they scattered to other

⁸ Rev. Liangkhaia, *Zopa Kutchhuak History Ziak leh chhut chhuah Hmasak Ber ... Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2002), 13.

⁹ Sumchonlal Hrangkhol, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhol...*, 7.

parts of North-East India. They claimed to have named Champhai,¹⁰ a sub-divisional centre in the eastern part of Mizoram at present.¹¹ A book titled “*Know Your Own Land*” records that “*The Pillars of Lungvando*”¹² was erected by the earlier inhabitants known as the Old Kukis who took their settlement before the Sailo migration.” Till today in North Vanlaiphai (15 miles from Lungdar) there is a memorial stone of Hrangkhawl Chief Chongluma, which was also known as ‘*Chhura fa rep*’ in the present generation.¹³ There is no clear evidence how long they had settled in Mizoram.

After several years passed, the tribe migrated to other regions of North-East due to the pressures they faced from the other tribes, which compelled them to leave their dwelling place. Some of them move down to the plain of Cachar area of Assam. K. Zawla asserted that they departed from Mizoram in 1750.¹⁴ Some had migrated towards Bangladesh, Manipur, Assam and Independent Hill Tipera (present Tripura). Commenting on the migration of the Hrangkhawl tribe to North East India, Lalrimawia wrote:

The Mizo tribes which first emigrated from Chin Hills into the present Mizoram and thenceforth into Cachar and Tripura, the Hrangkhawl, Darlong, Biate and Hmar with their offshoots, were generally distinguish as Old Kuki.¹⁵

¹⁰ ‘*Champhai*’ consist of two words, “*Cham*” means “*mastered leafs*” and “*phai*” means “*take out*” or “*to pull out*.” Dr Lalthanliana in his book, mention that when the Hrangkhawl people entered Mizoram their chief was Damlukaia, in the Hill of Mawmrang he reigned. He had a large amount of cattles and his house was made of leather. The strongest man Saizahawla was from the Hrangkhawl tribe. (Dr Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin* (Kum 1900 Hma Lam), Aizawl, 2000, 331-332. In Hrangkhawl Saizahawla was known as Denlikinthang.

¹¹ Vanlalchhuanawma, *Mission and Tribal Identity* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 2010), 177.

¹² ‘*Lungvando*’ means ‘stone pillars which support the sky.’

¹³ *Know Your Own Land (Mizoram) Series – V*, Tribal Research Institute, Directorate of Art and Culture, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1990, 62-64.

¹⁴ K. Zawla (ed.), *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, 6th Edition, (Aizawl, 1993), 151.

¹⁵ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram – History and Cultural Identity* (1890 – 1947) (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications 1995), 15.

2.4. Hrangkhawl of Tripura

One of the reasons that made the tribes to migrate out from Mizoram was that they could not tolerate the pressures coming from the Pawi and Lushai clans who were once known as very furious fighter.¹⁶ In order to protect their own people and community, they migrated to the plain area of Cachar after which they entered the Independent Hill of Tipera (Tripura).¹⁷ They entered the Independent Hill of Tipera from different areas through South and North district. All through their migration from one region to another, they encountered riot with different tribes but finally they were cooled down by the Tripura Maharaja (King). The Maharaja allowed them to settle in his Kingdom and land revenues were imposed on them.¹⁸

In the year 1821, the Tripura Maharaja recognized these tribal groups settling in his territory without a Chief of their own and clubs them together as one community basing on the common language they spoke. These tribal groups were known as *Baro Halam*¹⁹ community. These groups comprises of 12 tribes, namely as follows:

Ranglong, Kaipeng, Molsom, Hrangkhawl, Koloï, Rupini, Bawngchar, Bawng, Saihmar, Sakachep, Thangkachep and Morsephang.²⁰

¹⁶ Rupak Debnath, *Exploring Highlanders of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts* (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010), 22.

¹⁷ Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, 329.

¹⁸ Interview with Henry Hrangkhawl, (17.5.2011)

¹⁹ 'Baro Halam' means 'twelve tribes'. According to H.M. Bareh, The *Halams* are one of the earliest to have settled in Tripura. In the state itself, the *Halams* roamed from one hillock to hillock in search of land suitable for *jhum* cultivation. They are reputed to have been a ferocious people who used to kill strangers. Thus, their neighbor named them *Halam* which means 'killer of human'. In H. M. Bareh, *Encyclopedia of North-East India, Tripura*, Vol. 8, (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2001), 250.

²⁰ R.S. Rosangluaia, *A Brief Account of Ranglong* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1993), 7.

In these 12 tribal groups, the Maharaja appointed several persons for the office that of *Kalim*, *Kabur*, *Kamsako* and *Chapia*. All these persons had their own responsibility and also to look after over each tribe. Beside these twelve tribes, there were also other allied tribes such as the Khulong, Kawrbawng, Chadai, Dao and Naheen.

The term '*Halam*' was a combination of two words, '*Ha*' means '*earth*' and '*Lam*' means '*path*.' They named themselves '*Hriam*' or '*Hriam-Mi*,' which was equivalent to 'Highlander'.²¹

2.5. Clans and Kinship

Among the Hrangkhawl tribe there were 24 clans known as *Panchi*.²² They are as follows:

Pena, Phirpu, Cholkha, Dumkar, Bangkheng, Phouitong, and Chorai – these tribes were in North Cachar hills.²³ Bong, Langkai, Kazari, Dab and Tuisenvai – these were in the Plain areas of Cachar.²⁴ Roipu, Khuongpel, Laikai, Tangkor or Chuonbak, Dabder, Saituol, Sairang, Dawrza, Doromkha, Malalkha, Vaplom and Lawkatangyas – these were in the State of Tripura.²⁵

²¹ Debnath, *Exploring Highlanders of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts...*, 15.

²² Among the Hrangkhawl Tribes there are several sub-titles. Pena - (Sailikhin), Cholkha - (Suongsaikha, Lalchungkha, Achalkha, Simraikha, Zatekha), Dumkar – (Thirhlum, Tong, Mena, Kel-ai), Bangkheng – (Bapui, Motsun, Ngaia, Tualtok, Naitam).

²³ Interview with Rev. Lalneithang, (29. 4.2011)

²⁴ Interview with Rev. Rochunghnung, (29.4.2011)

²⁵ Some of the other sub-tribe have roles to play- a) *Saitual* is literally '*owner of rice*' member of this clan were in charge of the common granary. b) *Chuonbak* or *Tangkor* clan do the collection of cotton and revenue payment was their job. c) *Roipu* chief task was to find new sites for settlement whenever the village is shifted to another site. d) *Khuongpel* and *Dawrza* acted as 'drum-carrier' and 'drummer.' e) Laikai acted as herald. f) *Vaploms* during social ceremonies arranged hospitable feasts with gayal meat and rice-beer. g) *Lawkatangyas* rendered client service to Saitual and Roipu clan. (Rupak Debnath, *Exploring Highlanders of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts*, (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2010), 16.

2.6. Hrangkhawl Dialect

The Hrangkhawl tribe has its own dialect known as “*Hrangkhawl Chong*.” Like many of the tribes in North-East India, the Hrangkhawl tribes also do not possess or have a written script of their own until the coming of Christian missionaries. In communication, the Hrangkhawl in ancient past uses folklores, folktales, legends, stories that were preserved and passed on from one generation to the other. Their dialect had close similarity with that of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo race group.²⁶

3. Conclusion

The Hrangkhawl tribe claims to be one of the descendants of the Mongoloid descent which is also one of the racial groups of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo racial stocks of South East Asia. The tribes are one of the tribes that migrated to North-East India from Burma passing through China. They first settled at Champhai of Mizoram which later scattered to different parts of North-East India. Different traditions had been passing on regarding the origin, dialect, clans, etc but the fact was that the tribe had its own culture, dialect which makes the tribe unique.

²⁶ Interview with Henry Hrangkhawl, (17.5.2011)

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF THE HRANGKHAWL TRIBE

1. Introduction

In this chapter the discussion will be on the Socio-Cultural and Religious life of the Hrangkhawl tribe. The study will be on the area of socio-cultural life of the people that comprises of family, right of inheritance, birth, marriage, divorce, death, dress, dormitory system and position of woman in the society. Investigation will also include the village administration, traditional festivals and religious beliefs.

2. Socio-Cultural Life

2.1 Family Structure

The Hrangkhawl tribe was a patriarchal society where male held high authority. The father was considered to be the head who exercised power over family matters whereas the mother was confined only to household task. In family matter, the husband or the wife never addressed each other by their respective names but they addressed by saying 'uai'. Another way of addressing each other was that of their first born child in which they addressed by their eldest children's name.²⁷

2.2 Right of Inheritance

In the Patriarchal society, male was held in high authority in the society and this was the same in the case of property succession.²⁸ Therefore the property was inherited

²⁷ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 12.

²⁸ H. M. Bareh, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Tripura*, Vol. 8, (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 2001), 253.

from the male lineage of the family but in the case of sufficient properties – the father can share it among the sons as he wishes.²⁹ On the other hand, the female had no share in inheriting her family's property. Another important point in property inheritance was that if the family had no son, the property was automatically passed on to the nearest male kinship to the deceased.³⁰

2.3 Birth

Certain customs were followed by the Hrangkhawl tribe with regards to birth. When a new child was born to the family – the name was given depending on the sex of the child. If it is male the name was given on the 11th day but if it is a female the name was given on the 9th day. The child's name should take his/her grandfather's or grandmother's name. The child's name will consist of syllable not less than three. On this occasion special ritual and ceremonies are performed by the priest, known as '*tuitual-ar*'.³¹ On this day the child's hair was shaved which was supposed to be done by woman only. The ceremony requires a piece of cotton, fire, rice, egg and *dao*.³² When the male child's reached the age of 10 to 12 years, *dhutimiloi* ritual was necessary to observed whereas to a female child's *rashabom* ritual. These rituals are observed till today.³³

²⁹ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes: on the North East Frontier with an outline grammar of the Rangkhoh-Lushai Language*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1893), 16.

³⁰ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhohs*, 13.

³¹ "Tuitual-ar" is a purifying or sanctification ritual ceremony performed by priest. For instance, supposed a person is discharged from the hospital or returned from tour are regarded as unholy, so they are purified by performing tuitual-ar ritual ceremony.

³² Sumneibul Hrangkhoh, *The Hrangkhoh*, 13.

³³ H. M. Barih, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Tripura*, Vol. 8..., 254.

2.4 Marriage

With regards to marriage custom, the Hrangkhawl tribe follows the tradition of what they called ‘*marriage by service*’ known as ‘*Samak Chang.*’ According to this tradition – the bridegroom has to serve in his in-laws for a period of seven years after the negotiation was completed from both families. In the first three years, the groom was forbidden to sleep with his fiancé but by the end of the three years certain tradition had to carry out by the groom after which they were allowed to sleep together. This particular tradition which had been practiced by the Hrangkhawl tribe had some similarity with the life of Jacob the Patriarch in the Bible (Gen. 29:20). On completion of the service period the groom set up his own house and separate family.³⁴ Practice of Polygamy was illegal among the Hrangkhawl community.³⁵

A very peculiar practice among the Hrangkhawl society is ‘*vai-ir-ser*’ in which a bridegroom was prohibited either to touch or address by name to his elder sister-in-law (*vainu*) and vice-versa.³⁶

2.5 Divorce

Divorce was very rare among the Hrangkhawl society. In case of adultery, to men when caught in the act – a fine (*Pabi*) of Rs 300/- will be imposed on the culprit along with domestic animals such as pig and mithun (*Satha*). In case of woman, if she is caught in adultery, she will be exposed naked publicly by the relatives of the man’s wife

³⁴ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 14.

³⁵ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

especially the women folk. This act was known as ‘*nuzuar ir-ek*’. Therefore, divorce and adultery were very rare among Hrangkhawl in the early period.³⁷

2.6 Death

On the death of a person his/her spirit is believed to be remained either around the dead body or roaming in the surrounding area of the village. It can be discerned that the Hrangkhawl believed in the existence of human spirit (*mihriam irtha*).³⁸ There are two kinds of death namely natural death ‘*thi pangai*’ and unnatural death ‘*sara thi*’. In case of natural death the corpse was washed with hot water and wrapped with new clothes along with that food was prepared for the departed soul. Traditionally, the maternal uncle had to kick the floor near the head of the deceased person which is called ‘*luthun in rak*’.³⁹ After the relatives and friends of the deceased family assembled, the corpse was carried with procession to the cemetery (*than*) for cremation. In case of unnatural death the corpse was neither carried into the village nor formal funeral ceremony was performs but it had to be cremated where the person dies.⁴⁰

2.7 Dress

The Hrangkhawl males tied a thread round their waist in which a piece of cloth was hanged both in front and behind covering their private part and buttock which did not exposed them to be naked,⁴¹ which were called ‘*diar*’ or ‘*peduri*’. The woman wore

³⁷ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 14.

³⁸ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 12.

³⁹ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 18.

⁴¹ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 6.

'*puanbom*', a cloth extending from the waist to just below their knee, and another '*lungbom*' cloth covering from their breast to the knee.⁴²

Both male and female kept their hair long and tied in a knot at the back of their head. The knot is fastened with hair-pin (*Samkil*). Women wore great amount of ornaments like ear-ring (*toia-kuardo*), bracelet (*banhrial*) and necklace (*irthei*).⁴³

2.8 Dormitory System

Dormitory was very common to the different tribes of North East India. Like other tribes, the Hrangkhols too had a kind of dormitory system which is known as *Thanbuk* where young boys and unmarried men of the village come together for village's security. It was an institution for young men to learn and trained themselves on various arts and crafts, dance, music, wrestling and discipline. An art of defense against their foes were also instructed. Women were not allowed to get inside the *Thanbuk*. The house was also used as guest house for male stranger of the other villager.⁴⁴

2.9 Position of Women in the Society

In the early period of the Hrangkhawl society, women were considered as a weaker sex. From childhood, there is a clear cut division of labor between male and female. Whatever is considered to be female's task should not be touched by male.⁴⁵ Women were forbidden to take part in several areas of activities such as in a village council (*devan*), sacred place (*Bolzol*) where sacrificial ceremonies were held. The duty

⁴² Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 17.

⁴³ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 17.

⁴⁴ Interview with Dulal Hrangkhawl from Zion Hill Village, Rangamura, (24th May 2011).

⁴⁵ Letthuma Darlong, *The Darlongs of Tripura*, (Tripura: Tribal Research Institute, 1995), 157.

of a woman was entirely confined to household work.⁴⁶ They had very low status in the family as well as in the society. There is a saying “*nupang naipang*” which meant women are considered similar status with children.

2.10 Village Administration

The Hrangkhols were very vigilant in selection of a new village site by casting lot with split bamboos called *tasan* (omen). Traditionally, the houses were built of wood and bamboos, covered with thatch roof. The houses were built very close to one's neighbor. Numerous houses formed a big village where people exercised their customary laws.⁴⁷ They had their own administrative set-up under the leadership of a chief. Commenting on the village councils of the Hrangkhawl tribes, S. Barkataki wrote:

The Rangkhols have democratic traditions. Their villages are administered by a group of village officials, the Kalim or headman, the Kabur or assistant headman and their subordinates, Chapia-Kalim and Chapia-Kabur. These offices are not hereditary and an aspirant for the headmanship has to start at the bottom of the official hierarchy.⁴⁸

These village council consists of few members selected by consensus, and is headed by the *Rai* or chief who is the representative of Tripura Maharaja. The other official members are Kalim, Kabur, and Chapia. Their main responsibility is to promote justice, harmony and maintain law and order in the society.⁴⁹ ‘*Devan*’ or ‘*Roirelna*’ was the village council or court. These devan deals with all the matters that occur within the village like disputes between two villages, in which the two villages come together to

⁴⁶ Sumchonlal Hrangkhols, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 15.

⁴⁷ Sumchonlal Hrangkhols, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 13.

⁴⁸ S. Barkataki, *Tribes of Assam*, revised edition, New Delhi, 1984, 67.

⁴⁹ H. M. Barih, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Tripura*, Vol. 8..., 256.

resolve the matters. Matters within the community such as murder, adultery, divorce, fighting, etc were brought to the village court for judgment⁵⁰. In this regard, the village court was responsible for necessary action.

3. Traditional Festivals

The Hrangkhawl tribe was rich in different kinds of traditional festivals that had been celebrated in different ways and styles depending on its time and situation. Some of the important festivals are as follows-

3.1 Par-ngot (Plucking flower) Festival

This festival is mainly observed during the spring season. It is a youth festival where young boys and girls were engaged in collecting various kinds of flowers/orchids from the forest. The collected flowers were carried from the forest to the village and present it to every household and wished the family for their future prosperity. The youth celebrate the whole night with dancing, singing, etc without any special feast.⁵¹

3.2 Rualsa Fak Festival

The '*Rualsa fak*' festival was a community harvesting festival, literally it means 'dine together' or 'celebrate together.'⁵² This festival occupies a special place in the hearts of the Hrangkhawl people. It had been celebrated by the ancestor since time immemorial. It is a winter festival which is celebrated every year on the 1st February. The

⁵⁰ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 15.

⁵¹ Sounneibul and Zirsangpui Hrangkhol, *Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi*, (Guwahati: Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, 2010), 90.

⁵² Sumchonlal Hrangkhol, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 16.

celebration was usually held at a specific venue called the ‘*roikung or tungkung*’ where the ballads, dances and feasts took place. On this occasion the fermented rice beer was served and entertained themselves with ballad and dances. This festival marks the new beginning of everything in the community life.⁵³

4. Traditional Religious Beliefs

The traditional religion of the Hrangkhawl people was ‘*animism*’ known as ‘*sonong*’. They believed in the existence of supernatural forces of nature. In some cases they could not even pronounce the name of their gods and goddesses due to fear and honor. This leads them to worship through offerings and sacrifices.

Tradition asserts that the religion was first introduced by two sorcerers ‘*Saisiangkha and Olongkha*’ who were considered as god’s representatives. They oriented the practices of all kinds of rites and rituals ceremonies.

4.1 Concept of Gods and Deities

The Hrangkhawl people recognized the one Supreme Being which they called as ‘*chung pathian*’ (high god) who was powerful. Besides, they also recognized and believed in the existence of seventeen high gods namely ‘*chung pathian somhleisari*’.⁵⁴ According to C.A.Soppitt, there are three principal gods of the Hrangkhawl known as *Lambra, Golarai* and *Dudukal*. Beside these there are several minor gods and goddesses who work for good and evil.⁵⁵

⁵³ Sounneibul and Zirsangpui Hrangkhol, *Tienlai Pi Pu Thurchi*, 91.

⁵⁴ Sumchonlal Hrangkhol, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 8.

⁵⁵ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 11.

4.2 Place of Worship and Sacrifice

Sacrifices were the only acceptable means of worship and appeasement to their gods and goddess.⁵⁶ They choose a sacred place to perform offer and sacrifice called ‘*Bolzol*’ in the outskirts of the village, in which a tabernacle (*pathian rua-irbu*) was erected for different kinds of sacrifices. Traditionally, this place is restricted for women and children. Their worship and sacrifices demand animals such as fowl, pig, goat etc. The following ceremonies were also strictly observed:

a) ***Khaw-roinei***: It is a village ritual where the whole village observed as a taboo day. During this time strangers were prohibited to enter the village and the villagers were not allowed to go outside the village.

b) ***Bersi***: This is an important ritual for the welfare of the family.

c) ***Kebeng***: It is a female ritual to protect them from any form of disease and sickness.

d) ***Simbak***: It is also a family ritual performed at a private place in the house.⁵⁷

e) ***Surjuma Laijuma***: Literally it means ‘*sun and moon*.’ The Hrangkhawl claimed that they used to worship only the sun and moon in the past. They were unknown to worship deity and performing rite and ritual.⁵⁸

4.3 Role of the Priest and Prophet

The priest (*ochai*) and prophet (*deipu*) played an important role in the Hrangkhawl society. The priests were believed to be special people who were inspired by

⁵⁶ Lethuama Darlong, *The Darlongs of Tripura...*, 128.

⁵⁷ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhols*, 9.

⁵⁸ Sumneibul Hrangkhoh, *The Hrangkhoh*, 20.

divine power, so they were also known as ‘*ramtui-i-khian*’ (divinely inspired). They act as a mediator between the people and gods/goddess. Their principal activities were to cure sickness, verifying the cause of calamities, warning on the concern matter and offered sacrifices on behalf of the people.⁵⁹ They were subjected to see visions and visitations from gods and their appointment are not hereditary.⁶⁰ The powerful prophet are called ‘*doikola*’ (expert in sorcery and magic), who can predict the cause of a person’s death, natural calamities and sickness. Due to these practices, even the strangers are very frightened to enter the Hrangkhawl villages.⁶¹

5. Conclusion

The study brings about the importance of the socio-cultural and religious practices on the Hrangkhoh tribes which was also the backbone of their identity as a tribe. Their ways of living, village administration and governance, traditional festivals and religious beliefs appeared to be different and unique from other tribes in North-East India.

⁵⁹ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhohs*, 10.

⁶⁰ C. A. Soppitt, *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes...*, 18.

⁶¹ Sumchonlal Hrangkhoh, *A History of Christianity among the Hrangkhohs*, 10.

CHAPTER FOUR THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY AMONG THE HRANGKHAWL IN TRIPURA

1. Introduction

This chapter will focus on the coming of Christianity and their mission activities among the Hrangkhawl tribe in Tripura. The growth and development of the Church as well as the development of evangelism and mission will also be dealt with accordingly.

2. Brief History of the Birth of Christianity in Tripura

2.1 Pioneer Mission: Jesuit Missionaries

The inception of Christianity in the State of Tripura can be traced back to the 17th century when the Maharajah hired the service of the Portuguese and Indo-Portuguese to serve in the armies as gunners, doctors and surgeons.⁶² The earliest record on the coming of Christianity to Tripura was in the 1676 – 1685 when the King Ram Manikya invited the Jesuit Missionaries to preach the Gospel in the Palace.⁶³ In 1683, the King asked for missionaries and Fr. Ignitius Gomes S.J made a visit to Agartala but latter returned disappointed. The reason behind was that he noticed that the Christians at that time were little more than Baptized Hindus, the King was drunkard and was not serious about his commitment made earlier.⁶⁴ Since then the Christian Missionaries made several attempts to spread the Gospel in Tripura but of no success on their attempt. However there were

⁶² Sukhendu Debbarma, “Christianity in Tripura before the coming of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society,” in *Impact of Christianity on North-East India*, Edited by J. Puthenpurakal, (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications Sacred Heart Theological College, 1996), 329.

⁶³ Mohon Debbarma, “History of Christianity in Tripura with special reference to New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society,” in *Borok Christians’ Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (1938 – 1988), Agartala 2010, 114.

⁶⁴ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origins and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996), 25.

no written accounts on their mission activities in the State as such.⁶⁵ The British Missionary Society set up their mission centre at Dacca (present capital of Bangladesh) in 1792. They work along the border of Tripura, near Comilla about half way between Chandpur and Brahmanbaria, but were unable to enter the State. The reason was that the State had closed Christian mission activities (it was during the reign of King Rajdhar Manikya).

In 1818, King Ramganga Manikya once again asked the missionaries to work in his palace as teachers. Responding to the King invitation, Felix Carey, son of William Carey of Serampore visited Tripura. After this, he left for London and nothing was heard from him anymore.⁶⁶

In 1890 and 1891, the Arthington Aborigin Missionaries, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge tried to enter Tripura but were not allowed by the King of Tripura. The missionaries did not lose heart, they waited for a year at Brahmanbaria, but there was no change in the attitude of the King. The State was closed for the Gospel and the two missionaries left for Lushai Hills (present Mizoram).

2.2 Presbyterian Mission

The year 1912 was the beginning of the Christian Movement in Tripura, when a group of migrant Mizos from Bnghmun (Mizoram) migrated to Jampui Hills in North Tripura. The reasons of migration were due to the ban of gun, imposition of force labors

⁶⁵ Malsawmtluanga, *Indirect Evangelism Programs of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Mission Board with Special Reference to Calvary High School, Tuidu, Tripura*, Unpublished BD thesis, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 2010), 31.

⁶⁶ Mohan Debbarma, "History of Christianity in Tripura with special reference to New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society," in *Borok Christians' Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (1938 – 1988), Agartala 2010, 115.

and high taxation charged by the British.⁶⁷ This group had a number of 80 Christian's families including Deacon when they migrated under the chieftainship of Hrangvunga Sailo. At that time, the Mizo Christians belong to the Presbyterian Church. They stayed without Pastor, taken cared by the Deacon. Occasionally, Rev. Phawka of the Presbyterian Church from Lushai Hills used to visit and conduct Baptismal and Holy Communion services. When they arrived in Tripura, they started their work of evangelization among the people speaking languages allied to Mizo such as Darlong, Hrangkhawl, Bong, etc.⁶⁸

2.3 North-East India General Mission (NEIGM)

Fortunately, in 1917 Hrangvunga Sailo the Chief of Tlangsang invited Rev. Watkin R. Roberts, the founder of North-East India General Mission (hereafter as NEIGM), to help and support in the mission work in Tripura.⁶⁹ In responds to the invitation, Rev. Watkin R. Roberts agreed and sent two evangelists, Thangtea and Khuanga.⁷⁰ So, it can be said that the first missionary activities had begun in Tripura with the support of NEIGM. In the same year on October⁷¹, Hmar Khawbung Dohnuna was sent as Field Secretary at Tlangsang village in Tripura.⁷² At the early stage, the missionaries had to face difficulty and opposition but their evangelistic works continued

⁶⁷ Mohan Debbarma, "History of Christianity in Tripura with Special Reference to New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society," in *Tripura Gospel Centenary Souvenir (1911-2011)*, Jampui 2011, 45

⁶⁸ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Christianity in Tripura before the coming of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society...*, 331.

⁶⁹ Rualchhinga, *Raja Hrangvunga Sailo (1887-1943) Tripura-a Chanchintha puluttu chu*, (Aizawl: L. T. L. Publications, 2002), 68. (Hereafter cited as Rualchhinga, Raja Hrangvunga...)

⁷⁰ Letthuama Darlong, *The Darlong of Tripura*, 231.

⁷¹ Z. Lianthanga, *Tripura a Kohhran a lo din tanna leh Chanchintha a darh zel dan*, (Tripura: Jampui-Sakhan Baptist Association, 1996), 19.

⁷² Rev. Hmar Khawbung Dohnuna was a businessman, who was considered as richest, embraced Christianity during the revival of 1913 in Mizoram. (Vanlalchhuanawma, *Mission and Tribal Identity*, 130).

and progress under the NEIGM patronage.⁷³ The mission had sowed the seed of the Gospel as far as Hawaibari (kukis village) about 20 miles east of Agartala.⁷⁴ As the NEIGM mission was expanding steadily and smoothly, suddenly from 1923 there was a conflict between the foreign missionary Rev Watkin R. Robert and H. T. Coleman, General Secretary of NEIGM, on the ground of financial misappropriation in the management of mission work.⁷⁵ On June 27, 1931 the mission was divided into two namely the *Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission* and *the NEIGM*.⁷⁶ Due to this reason, a great division occurred among the Church members⁷⁷ in Tripura as well as Manipur and Cachar.⁷⁸

2.4 New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society (NZBMS)

During these crises within the State, The New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society (hereafter to be cited as NZBMS) was permitted to establish mission centre by the Tripura King Bir Bikram Kishore at Arundhitinagar in Agartala in 7th November 1938.⁷⁹ Their mission activities in the State had started since 1885 where they had put a lot of efforts. However, the King gave them permission under one condition: the Missionaries should not preach the Gospel to the two tribes namely Debbarma and Reangs. According to Sukhendu Debbarma, the reason behind was that they were developing a new social

⁷³ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origins and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, 33.

⁷⁴ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origin and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, 38.

⁷⁵ Rev. Lalhuala Darlong, "How the Gospel of Jesus Christ first entered into the Dark State of Tripura," in *Tripura Gospel Centenary 1911-2011 Souvenir*, (Jampui: Tripura Gospel Centenary Celebration Organizing Committee, 2011), 87.

⁷⁶ Rualchhinga, *Raja Hrangvunga ...*, 156.

⁷⁷ Letthuama Darlong, *The Darlong of Tripura*, 233.

⁷⁸ Rualchhinga, *Raja Hrangvunga ...*, 156

⁷⁹ Mohan Debbarma, "History of Christianity in Tripura with special reference to New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society," in *Borok Christians' Golden Jubilee Souvenir (1938 – 1988)*, Agartala 2010, 120.

system.⁸⁰ Thus, there were full freedoms for the missionary to spread the Gospel among the Halam Community.⁸¹

Later at Laxmilunga village, under the favorable guidance of the NZBMS missionary, twenty delegates from thirteen local Churches came together and organized a platform to incorporate the Churches of Tripura under one umbrella.⁸² The reunion of Churches or *Church Ecumenical Movement* which is known as the *Tripura Baptist Christian Union* (TBCU) took place in 1944 in Tripura.⁸³ In this gathering the Churches reflected back to the past events where Christians in the region had experienced hardship. At present there were 16 (sixteen) Association and 700 Churches under the *TBCU* with total members of approximately one lakhs.

3. The Advent of Christianity among the Hrangkhawl Tribe

Raja Hrangvunga who was the Chief of Tlangsang village had interested to evangelize a group of people speaking the allied language with that of the Mizo, Kuki, Halam, etc. Therefore, the NEIGM took the initiatives in expanding their missionary activities as far as to the Hawaibari village. In this Hawaibari village, a missionary *Chauautera*⁸⁴ took the initiative in sharing the Gospel to one of the Hrangkhawl villages *Sortok*.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Christianity in Tripura before the coming of the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society...*, 332.

⁸¹ Interview with Norendro Hrangkhawl on 15th December 2011

⁸² Samuel Laldusaka, "Tripura Rama Chanchin Tha Zinkawng", in *Tripura Gospel Centenary Souvenir (1911-2011)*, (Jampui: Tripura Gospel Centenary Celebration Organizing Committee, 2011), 79.

⁸³ Rualchhinga, *Raja Hrangvunga ...*, 157.

⁸⁴ According to Rualchhinga, Evangelist Chauautera was referred as Pastor Chauautera who was the then pastor of Zotlang in 1921. And in interview with Samram Hrangkhawl Evangelist Chauautera worked at Hawaibari for 3 years.

⁸⁵ Interview with Pi. Lalpanhwi (Lalli) (125 years an old woman) on 12th May 2011.

3.1 Response to the Gospel

Haia Bunoyhari⁸⁶ Hrangkhawl of Sortok village (popularly known as Haia) was the first Christian convert among the Hrangkhawl through the preaching of evangelist Chautera in 1928.⁸⁷ It was said that he accepted the Christian faith during the service in his father-in-law's home as a marriage custom in the Hrangkhawl society. Because of his conversion, the villagers excommunicated him from the village. Due to this reason he decided to select a new site for his house near the village, but he was not permitted by the villagers.⁸⁸ So, he shifted from Sortok to Hawaibari village to live among the Kuki Christians for twelve years.⁸⁹ During his stay at the village, he was appointed as evangelist for ten years and also he was sent to Duptali village as evangelist for two years.⁹⁰

3.2 Leadership Crisis in the Church

The split of the NEIGM and Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission had also affected Kuki Church. In 1931, Laibata, an Evangelist of the area was appointed as Pastor in charge for Hawaibari. However, he demised in 1935, and the area was left without Pastor. So, the Hawaibari Church sent Dawna and Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl, the first two converts to contact with the NZBMS mission at Brahmanbaria in East Bengal (present Bangladesh).

⁸⁶ But according to Sukhendu Debbarma, the first converted person among the Halam community was *Sumchongram* in 1924. See. Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origins and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, 59.

⁸⁷ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origins and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, 59.

⁸⁸ Interview with Samram Hrangkhawl (b. 1937 in Sortok Village) on 12th May, 2011.

⁸⁹ Sukhendu Debbarma, *Origins and Growth of Christianity in Tripura*, 59.

⁹⁰ Interview with Samram Hrangkhawl on 12th May, 2011. (For how many years Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl worked as evangelist was unknown, but approximately he might have worked approximately for 12 years).

They were sent to request the mission to support and look after the Church.⁹¹ During that time the NZMBS were not allowed to enter and work in Tripura. But the mission responded positively by sending, a Garo teacher named Abraham Sangma from Mymensingh to nurture them.⁹² Abraham Sangma was sent without taking permission from the King.

3.3 Establishment of Hrangkhawl Christian Village and Church

In 1940 the NZBMS purchased a new site for the Hrangkhawl Christian village. In the same year Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl, Rengsomthang and Boktobaigo shifted from Hawaibari village to this new village.⁹³ They named the village as *Pathian Thu Khua* (Dokkhin Pulinpur) means *Village of God's Word* or *God's word village*.⁹⁴ In the meantime, Sumchongram Hrangkhawl and Sumchonghari Hrangkhawl a sibling from Sortok village embraced Christianity.⁹⁵ They were persecuted by the villager on the ground of conversion and chased them out of the village in which they too shifted to this new village. In 1947 two more families were added to this Christian village namely Subothang and Lalneithang Hrangkhawl.⁹⁶ The Christians families began to increase in numbers day by day. On February 1944, Christian in this village erected a Church building in which the members were of seven families under the patronage of NZBMS.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Samuel Laldusaka, "Tripura Rama Chanchin Tha Zinkawng", in *Tripura Gospel Centenary Souvenir (1911-2011)*, (Jampui: Tripura Gospel Centenary Celebration Organizing Committee, 2011), 74.

⁹² Tripura Baptist Christian Union, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1938-1988*, 74.

⁹³ Interview with Norendra Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 14th December 2011.

⁹⁴ Interview with Rev Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 13th May 2011.

⁹⁵ Interview with B.K. Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 25th May 2011 (He is at present one of the MLA [congress] of Tripura State).

⁹⁶ Interview with Samram Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra, Ambassa on 15th December 2011.

⁹⁷ Interview with B.K. Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 25th May 2011.

In the same year, the mission also established primary school with a Garo teacher and later joined by Tongnilo Kuki.⁹⁸

3.4 Establishment of Church in Different Villages

The numbers of Christian continue to increase rapidly and the new village was congested with houses which were in a small plot of land. The people decided to shift the village to another place where it will be of a better future for the Church. Under the leadership of Haia Bunoyhari in 1948, fifteen families move to Ambassa (present Dhalai district) and founded a new village named Chandrai (the first Hrangkhawl Christian village in Ambassa area). The mission school was established in the area where Ganga Chondro Garo was appointed as evangelist teacher. Therefore, many people shifted to this village for their better future and educational purpose. The number of students increases each year and due to this reason the school's committee appointed another two teachers Nironjon Ghakra and Jobdo Kumar Hrangkhawl (son of Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl) to meet the school's administration requirement. Later due to financial crisis the school was handed over to Government of Tripura.⁹⁹

In June, 1949 Church members of *Pathian thu khua* like Sumchongram Hrangkhawl, his younger brother Sumchonghari Hrangkhawl and other families shifted from *Pathian thu khua* to Kamalacherra village. The reasons for this shifting to Kamalacherra village were of three reasons:¹⁰⁰

- a.** The land which they settle belong to mission property

⁹⁸ Interview with Samram Hrangkhawl on 12th May 2011.

⁹⁹ Interview with Rev Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl retired Pastor of Kamalacherra on 12th May 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with B.K. Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 16th December 2011.

b. The Christian families were increasing, the land becomes very small, and was congested, and

c. They were agrarian society who depends on jhum cultivation and natural resources. Therefore, they shifted from one place to another in order to have a free space for livelihood and for cultivation.

4. Activities of Mission and Evangelism

4.3 Native Missionaries

4.3.1 Voluntary Missionaries

For many years the trio Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl, Sumchongram and his younger brother Sumchonghari Hrangkhawl work as a voluntary missionaries in order to evangelize their own tribes. Their mission was successful and many were converted to Christianity through their preaching, distribution of gospel tract and audio visual.¹⁰¹ These three persons were the pioneer missionaries among the Hrangkhawl tribe during the early period of Christianity in Tripura.

4.3.2 Missionary

Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl was born in Sortok village to Suna Chandro Hrangkhawl and Korsumhoi Hrangkhawl on 26th June, 1940. He had his education from nursery to sixth class at Arundhiti nagar mission school (Agartala) and from seventh to eleventh class at Bordoili Higher Secondary School, Adi Nagar (Agartala). He encountered with Christianity during his school life that led him to baptism in 1954. In

¹⁰¹ Interview with Robin Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 15th December 2011.

1961 he was appointed as an evangelist teacher at Baptist Primary School, Kamalacherra for 3 years. In those days, his monthly salary was only Rs.26. Later he was transferred to St. Paul's school as teacher from 1964–1965. From 1966–1968, he worked as evangelist teacher in Kamalacherra and Chandrai village.

In 1969, he started his theological studies at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat (Assam) where he graduated with a Bachelor of Theology Degree in 1972. From 1973–1974 he was appointed as a Hostel Superintendent at St. Paul Baptist school at Agartala. In 1975, he was posted as an evangelist teacher at Nupang Rumba (Kaipeng village). In 1976, he was posted again to Rai Pasha (Muolsom village) as evangelist teacher. In 1977 he changes his denomination from Baptist to Evangelical Free Church of India (EFCI).

He was appointed as Pro–Pastor in the EFCI and was ordained in 1978. He served as a Pastor till 2006. During his pastoral ministry he baptized 1085 and solemnized holy matrimonial ceremonies of 61 couples and registered marriage of 104 couples.¹⁰²

4.3.3 Evangelism through School

The mission of the NZBMS was mostly to educate the people whoever embraced Christianity. In the beginning when the Hrangkhawl tribe founded a Christian village the missionaries established primary school for the children of new believers with Bengali medium of instruction but later the school was handed over to the Government of Tripura. When the villagers moved to another village at Chandrai (Ambassa), the mission, even though their first established school was handed over to Government, a new primary school was set up again at the village Chandrai.

¹⁰² Interview with Rev. Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl on 12th May 2011.

4.3.4 The Growth of Churches in Hrangkhawl Village

Since its inception, the Churches among the Hrangkhawl community in Rangamura and Kamalacherra village under the favorable guidance of NZBMS (Tripura Baptist Church Union) grows from strength to strength each year. After few years other Church organizations and mission societies entered and worked among the Hrangkhawl tribe. Since some of the Church members had strong feeling for the need of education and establishment of school, the Church's leaders made contact with the EFCI and enquired whether the Church could help them in establishing school in the Hrangkhawl village. In 1977 some of the churches in the Hrangkhawl village joined EFCI Church and in the same year Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl got an appointment as Probationary Pastor, who was ordained in 1978 as Pastor.¹⁰³ In a short span of time the EFCI Church spread rapidly in the Hrangkhawl villages. After that many Church denominations like the Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church of India, Seventh Day Adventist, Salvation Army and United Pentecostal Churches found a way to enter Tripura and work among the Hrangkhawl tribe.

5. Conclusion

Christianity was not a new religion to the people of Tripura as it was founded since long back. It is noticeable that the missionary endeavor was not in vain even though there were opposition, obstacles and hardships in the beginning, but the Gospel was shared and witnessed by the people day by day. Through the missionary work of '*Chuaftera*' the Gospel was extended to the Hrangkhawl, which was first embraced by

¹⁰³ Interview with Rev Joy Kumar Hrangkhawl on 12th May 2011.

Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl and later followed by several families. Even though Haia was the pioneer Christian and evangelist in the beginning, his two brothers Sumchongram and Sumchonghari Hrangkhawl had had exceptionally contributed to the growth and development of the Church among the Hrangkhawl tribe.

CHAPTER FIVE
IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE LIFE OF
THE HRANGKHAWL TRIBE IN THEIR SOCIO-CULTURAL
AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the positive impacts of Christianity on the Hrangkhawl socio-cultural and religious life. The other section will deal with the negative impacts of Christianity.

2. Positive Impact of Christianity on Socio-Cultural life of Hrangkhawl Tribe

2.1 Economic Status

In the ancient past and before Christianity entered the State, the main occupation of the Hrangkhawl people was agriculture particularly jhum cultivation. No doubt the people were engaged in self-supporting lifestyle yet they lived a nomadic life in search of better land for jhumming. Their economic status was not up to a good level because during their early days they were fond of eating, drinking, dancing and singing. “*Spare not for the morrow*” was their every day motto. When Christianity entered the land and with the help from the missionaries they could learn the method of economy. They learned how to earn their livelihood and at the same time to spend less for future utilization.¹⁰⁴

2.2 Concerning Birth Rites

In the ancient past the society holds a tradition where they used to perform certain rites and rituals. One of these rites was “*nainei irthiangna*” meaning “*birth purification*”

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Robin Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 16th December 2011.

was performed when a new child was born in the family. Unless this rite was performed, the priest (*ochai*) and other elders of the society were prohibited to enter the house as they regard it as unholy. The birth rite had to be performed by a priest. On this particular occasion the child's name was given according to his/her grandfather/grandmother's name. Another rite which was known as '*naitual sua*' (*for male dhutimiloi and for female rasabom*) was to be observed when a child attained the age of 11 to 12 years. When Christian mission was established in the State, these traditional rites were replaced by Christian practices. When a child is born a Pastor or Church Elder used to offer a word of thanksgiving prayer. Even on naming the child – the service were conducted by the pastors and elders of the church.¹⁰⁵

2.3 Concerning Marriage Custom

Before the inception of Christianity the custom concerning marriage was taken very seriously by the Hrangkhawl community. When a man wants to marry a woman the parents of both families negotiate and if they agreed with each other then the man had to undergo a service of seven years in his father-in-law house. After completion of the service the man along with his family were allowed to settle separately.

Since Christianity became the religion of Hrangkhawl, the service rendered to in laws no longer exist. In Christianity, marriage is a solemn religious ceremony that requires solemn vows between the bride and bridegroom. The ceremony is performed inside the Church by an ordained minister. The custom of paying bride-price is still exist, but it was fixed for everyone which is affordable to the community. Traditionally,

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Simon Hrangkhawl of Kamalacherra on 13th December 2011.

matrimonial ceremonies are community affairs where everyone took part in the celebration which was always associated with liquor (*rice beer*). But now with Christianity, although it was one of the community special occasions, drinking of liquor is totally restricted and enjoyed the occasion with feasts and singing Christian hymns.

2.4 Concerning Death Rites

The Hrangkhawl community classified death into two types i.e. the natural death (*mithi*) and the unnatural death (*sarathi*). Normal death was regarded as natural death and accidental death like suicide, drowning, burned to death and other accidental deaths as unnatural death. Depending on these two natures of death the funeral ceremonies were performed in which the dead body is cremated. The dead body was decorated with ornaments and some food items were prepared for the departed soul. With the coming of Christianity, these traditional death rites had been eliminated and replaced by Christian practices. Cremation is no longer practiced instead it was replaced by burial. According to Christian practices the burial ceremonies were performed either by Pastor or by Church elder.

2.5 Abstinance of Intoxicants

The practice of intoxicant things like liquor, smoking, chewing of tobacco and '*tuibur*' were very common in the Hrangkhawl society. Moreover, drinking of liquor was very much related with the traditional religious festivals in the society. But, Christianity had brought out new concepts of holy living. Most of the Church members are totally

refrained from intoxicant things. This is one of the positive impacts of Christianity in Tripura Churches.¹⁰⁶

2.6 Women Position in the Society

The status of women in the Hrangkhawl community was very low; they had no right in the religious and society arena. They were neither allowed to go to the sacrificial places nor participate in the village council committee (*devan or loko*). They were even regarded as less important than male in the families. Due to this reason, they were not sent to school for education. With the advent of Christianity, the position of the Hrangkhawl women had been greatly improved. The Church gives privilege to participate in the Church activities for womenfolk and opened a platform for them to organize themselves into fellowships. In the present context of the Hrangkhawl society *Women Fellowship* is one of the main pillar of the Church.¹⁰⁷ They actively involved in building up a good Christian family and in religious activities contributed immensely for the growth and development of the Church. Therefore, women played a vital role in the transformation of the Hrangkhawl community.

3. Impact on the Traditional Religious Life

With the coming of Christianity to the Hrangkhawl society, people left all their old traditional religion and embraced Christianity as their own religion. Their traditional religious beliefs and practices were totally transformed.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Michael Hrangkhawl of Tuimairang on 28th February, 2012

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Synem Hrangkhawl of Zion Hill on 19th December 2011.

3.1 The Concept of Gods and Deities

As already mentioned, the traditional religion of the Hrangkhawl was animism. They believed in the existence of numerous high gods and goddess called '*Chung Pathian somhlei sari*'. Besides these they also believed in *One Supreme Being* called '*Chung Pathian*' who was the most powerful god. They also believed in the existence of spirit. In order to appease their gods and goddess as well as the evil spirits sacrifices were offered respectively.

When the people converted to Christianity their concept of one God continue to exist but with new understanding of God. The concept of having numerous deities also vanished. Christianity brought new concept of one God, salvation, heaven and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. The fear of evil spirits is wiped out as they affirmed their faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸

3.2 Place of Worship and Sacrifice

In the traditional religious practice of the Hrangkhawl community, the sacrificial ceremonies were generally offered in a sacred place called '*Bolzol*'. According to the demand made by priest (*ochai*) the sacrificial items like pig, goat or fowl were offered. The sacrificial meats were to be consumed only by the male member. Women and children were prohibited to participate in these ceremonies. When the people embraced Christianity, their sacrificial and ritual places was replaced by Churches in which irrespective of sex can come together to worship God. Thus, Christianity presents a liberty from the bloody sacrifices.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Oino Hrangkhawl of Zion Hill on 19th December 2011.

3.3 Role of the Priest and Prophet

The priest and prophet (*Ochai and Deipu*) played an important role in the religious activities of the Hrangkhawl community. They held high position in the society and without priest and prophet the ritual and rites cannot be performed. But with the coming of Christianity, their role and responsibilities were replaced by Church leaders like Pastors and Church Elders.

4. Education

Before the advent of Christianity in Tripura, school education was unknown to the Hrangkhawl community. There were no formal schools in the Hrangkhawl area. In 1943, New Zealand Baptist Missionaries started St. Paul's School at Arundhitinagar, where a number of boys and girls obtained their school education. With the arrival of Christian missionaries at *Pathian Thu Khua/Dokkhin Polinpur* (first Hrangkhawl Christian village) mission school was established. They also started school in some of the Hrangkhawl villages which is up to primary level. The students who passed out from the village school were sent to St. Paul's School for higher studies. Many parents could not send their children to a private school due to economic and financial problems. So, in 1st February 1974, Zion Hill School was established under "*Tripura Tribal Linguistic Institution Private Enterprise*" (TTLIPE). The founders were Pu Dulal Hrangkhawl and Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl. Beside the Roman Catholic school and TBCU School – this school was the first English medium school in Tripura. Classes were first started with only 6 students and two teachers (J.D. Mawia from Jampui village and Pu Dulal Hrangkhawl from Zion Hill village). At present the total numbers of students were 295

pupils, 14 teachers and 10 staffs.¹⁰⁹ Today, the Hrangkhawl tribe has many educated and qualified persons who were engaged in different area of professions.

5. Negative Impact of Christianity

Christianity not only brought transformation in a positive way, but also brought changes that can be seen as negative impact to the society.

5.1 Inactive of Village Administration

The Hrangkhawl tribe had a good set up of village council under the leadership of Chief (*Kalim*) with other official members. They had full authority and responsibilities in order to promote harmony, justice, law and order in the society. All matters were discussed by the village council committee. But with the advent of Christianity, most of the villages were inhabited by both Christians and non-Christians. During the village council committee election, the Christians wanted to take part but were not allowed to cast votes or nominated for the post. They were banned and unable to participate in the village council. The reason is that if Christians were elected as the officio members such as *Kalim*, *Kabur* and *Chapia*, once they are inducted for their respective responsibilities they were obliged to perform certain rites and rituals. With this reason certain controversial issues happened and the village council system, therefore, could not function properly.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Dulal Hrangkhawl, Chairman Zion Hill Church on 9th December 2011.

5.2 Rise of Denominational Feelings

On the ground of denomination, the Hrangkhawl community was ignorant and unknown in their early Christian's. They lived a life of harmony and solidarity with each other as a community since its inception till 1975. But from 1976 onwards the Churches were split into various denominations which led to disunity in the society and denominational feeling exists within the church. In the earlier society, however, in matter of relationship there was mutual understanding between the villages, but later due to the rise of denominational feeling in the Church, mutual relationship between villages is no longer to be seen in the society.¹¹⁰

5.3 Elimination of Traditional Festivals

Traditional festivals were the occasion in which the community assembled together to rejoice the events with their valuable traditional folksongs and dances. Harvesting festival '*Rualsafak or Khonhoi*' and spring festival '*par-nghot*', both were the main festivals that occupy a special place in the hearts of Hrangkhawls. Usually, the celebration was held at a specific place where ballad dance, folksong and feasts used to take place. But with the advent of Christianity, both these festivals were celebrated no more. The discontinuation of the festivals had lead to the disappearing of these traditional dances, folksongs, which were once a very precious possession of the Hrangkhawl's identity.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Chandra Hari Hrangkhawl of Zion Hill on 21st December 2012.

5.4 Annihilation of the Dormitory System

Bachelor dormitory was one of the important premises to most of the tribes of North East India and it was so to the Hrangkhawl tribe as well. It was an institution where they were trained and instructed on various kinds of arts, skills, crafts, dances, music, wrestling, discipline as well as an art of defense against their foes. The hall was also used as a guest house for male strangers from other villages. Again with the advent of Christianity, this dormitory system was abolished and was replaced by the Church. In the modern society of the Hrangkhawl tribe most of the arts, skills, and crafts design that were received from dormitory were abandoned.

5.5 Abandonment of Traditional Dress

Before the advent of Christianity, in the Hrangkhawl community, both men and women used to keep their hair long and tied in a knot at the back of their head. The knot is fastened with a hair-pin (*Samkil*). Women wore '*puanbom*' (a cloth extending from the waist to just below their knee), and a great amount of ornaments like ear-ring '*toia-kuardoi*', bracelet '*banhrial*' and necklace '*irthei*.' This indigenous dress of a woman shows the esteem identity of their own tribe. But after the coming of Christianity, these traditional dresses were worn occasionally. The modern youths do not want to expose themselves by wearing the indigenous dresses.

5.6 Discontinuation of Reverence in Family Life

A very peculiar practice among the Hrangkhawl society was to give reverence to the elder sister-in-law/brother-in-law which was called as '*vai-ir-ser*'. A man should not

directly touch and address his elder sister-in-law by name and vice versa. As Christianity takes its root among the Hrangkhawl tribes, these customs and practices were slowly began to disappear from the society. Thus, in terms of respect – it can be a negative impact of Christianity.

6. Conclusion

We could see that Christianity had made a great impact on the socio-cultural and religious life of the Hrangkhawl tribe who had experience significant changes along its routes in different ways in its interaction with Christianity. Its impacts can be seen in introducing new concepts of faith and beliefs that gave them a better way of living. But on the other hand, its impact can be seen from a negative perspective on the traditional life of the Hrangkhawl people like eradicating some of the cultural and moral values of the Hrangkhawl society.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

This is a summary of the study on *An Evaluation of the Impact of Christianity on the Hrangkhawl Tribe in Tripura* which was undertaken. In this task we have used the published as well as the unpublished sources. Such an attempt has therefore been made to show the impact of Christianity on the Hrangkhawl society especially in the area of socio-cultural and religious life of the people. Therefore, to conclude, it is necessary to look back and recollect what has been recognized from our study, as well as to look forward to make further examination.

First Chapter dealt with the introduction of the whole thesis where the study is considered as necessary. Like any other tribal societies of North-East India, Christian mission societies also reached the Hrangkhawl community in Tripura. With the advent of Christianity, the society of the Hrangkhawl tribe had experienced remarkable changes in the socio-cultural and religious life. The impact of changes had been both positive and negative. Therefore, this research was an evaluation on the impact of Christianity on the life of the Hrangkhawl people.

Second Chapter discussed the background of the Hrangkhawl people. We had also examined the geographical background of Tripura State. The study also traced the historical origin of the Hrangkhawl tribe, i.e. their migration and settlement, their clans and kinship and their dialect. The Hrangkhawl tribes were the descendant of the Mongoloid descent belonging to the same with that of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo racial stock of South East Asia. They migrated to North East India from Burma through China and settling first in Champhai district of Mizoram. Different traditional saying was made

towards the Hrangkhawl tribe relating their origin, dialect, clans, etc but the uniqueness of the tribe was that they followed their own traditional culture.

Third Chapter discussed about the socio-cultural and religious life of the Hrangkhawl tribe. Study shows that the Hrangkhawl tribe, before the coming of Christian missionaries, holds the socio-cultural life very seriously like the family structures, right inheritance, birth rites, marriage customs, divorce, death rites, dress, dormitory system, position of women in the society, village administration, traditional festival and the traditional religious beliefs. The socio-cultural and religious practice brings the Hrangkhawl tribes together as one community and that their identity as a tribe was reflected through this practice.

Fourth Chapter describes about the arrival of Christian missionaries that work among the Hrangkhawl community in the State of Tripura. The inception of Christianity in the State could be traced back to 1683 when a Roman Catholic Priest Fr. Ignitius Gomes S.J pays a visit to Tripura. However, his short visit doesn't convince either the King or the people of the land with regard to Christian faith. Later several mission societies had made attempts to enter and spread Christian faith to the people, but their mission activities in the land were of no avail since Christian mission activities were banned by the King.

With the migration of the Mizo Christians from Bnghmun village to Jampui Hills in the year 1912 becomes an important landmark in the history of Christianity in Tripura. These migrated Christians came along with their zeal to spread the Christian faith among their own allied tribes. In fact they were the pioneers in spreading Christian faith among allied tribes like the Darlongs, Hrangkhawls, Kukis, etc.

Under their evangelistic interest, Christianity reached the Hrangkhawl tribe in 1928 through the evangelist *Chuaftera*. The first Christian convert among the Hrangkhawl was *Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl* from *Sortok* village. Before Christianity could really spread among the Hrangkhawl tribe, the NEIGM mission was split into two that causes lacks of mission society in the area to look after the newly Churches. With these requirements the Hawaibari Church sent two men Haia Bunoyhari Hrangkhawl and Dawna to seek support from the NZBMS (who were in Brahmanbaria in the border of Tripura).

In the early period attempts had been made by the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society to begin mission work in Tripura. However, with much patient, the NZBMS were successful in entering Tripura in 1938. This event can be marked as the beginning of Christianity in the State reaching not only to a particular tribes or community. The NZBMS mission activities were not confined to one particular groups but it was extensive to all.

By the time the NZBMS enters Tripura; several tribes like Darlong, Kukis, and Hrangkhawls had already become Christians. With this new faith most of the Hrangkhawl Christians were sent out from the village but under the positive patronage of the NZBMS the first Hrangkhawl Christian community could found shelters. Not only that this mission established schools in several villages to enlighten the people through education.

Inspite of hardships and difficulties Christianity gradually grow slowly and steadily among the Hrangkhawl tribe. Native missionaries like Haia Bunoyhari,

Sumchongram and Sumchonghari Hrangkhawl contributes a lot for the growth and development of the Hrangkhawl Churches. By the end of 1980 almost all the Hrangkhawls had embraced Christianity.

Fifth Chapter dealt with the impact made by Christianity on the life of the Hrangkhawl tribe in Tripura that includes both aspect of impact positive as well as negative. The main objective of this study was to bring out the contribution made by Christianity towards the socio-cultural and religious life of the people. Like many other States in North East India, Christianity had played a major role in the life of the Hrangkhawl community in Tripura. With the coming of Christianity, various changes had taken place in the society like the introduction of education, schools, uplifting the status of women, the art of cultivation and moreover their understanding towards their traditional religion was totally transformed and at the same time was replaced by Christian practices. Looking back at their efforts toward the society their contributions were enormous.

On the other hand, Christianity becomes a hindrance towards the culture of the people. Hrangkhawl tribes like any other tribes of North East India were rich in their traditional culture which was also their identity as a tribe. In North East India, we cannot separate people from their culture as it is the centre of their lives. But with the coming of Christianity, the traditional culture of the people began to diminish and even forgotten. Christian missionaries who came to the North East region were always against the culture of the people – likewise with the Hrangkhawl tribe in Tripura. Some of the negative impacts of Christianity on the socio-cultural life of the Hrangkhawl community were firstly, it had inactive of village councils where the whole community shares a common

platform. Secondly, it had caused disunity due to denominationalism and thirdly, it eliminated some of the valuable identity like the traditional festivals and customs of the Hrangkhawl community.

Christianity among the Hrangkhawls in Tripura had gone by 80 years of age, almost all the tribe had embrace Christianity. However, looking at the present situation of the Churches, their growth and development were very slow compared with the years that had passed by. What must be the reason for the slow progress of the Church? Several solutions can be made for the reason which may not really satisfy. The main finding of the reason was that the Hrangkhawl tribe in Tripura could not differentiate gospel and culture. Another thing is that though almost all the tribe embraces Christianity yet they did not receives teaching and guidance on Christian ways of living.

This put forward a challenge for the present Church to look in the matter seriously where culture and Christian ways of living is needed to initiate and incorporate in the Church.