"THE MOST MANLY AND VIRILE MISSIONARY GROUND IN THE EMPIRE": AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AMONG THE NAGAS

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Introduction

Reverend Samuel Alden Perrine, an American Baptist Missionary who worked in the Naga hills from 1892 to 1906 pronounced this region "the most manly and virile missionary ground in the [British] Empire." A strong advocate for missionary work among the tribes of North East India, Perrine proclaimed the Nagas in the hinterland manly men who were "equal if not superior to the average American Christian."[1] I begin with Perrine's characterization of the region and the people he worked with as "manly" to underscore the importance of gender to missionary work.

While Christians in India today number only slightly over two percent of the total population,[2] they form the majority in three North Eastern states: Nagaland (over 90 percent), Mizoram (over 90 percent), and Meghalaya (over 70 percent). Since North East India was neither a destination popular with missionaries nor well financed, historians have asked how this happened. Explanations of missionary success have focused on one or a combination of the following elements: the powerful faith of the missionaries, the support of colonial authorities, the politics of translation, the ways in which Christian theology resonated with the religious cosmologies of the targeted people, and the vulnerability of tribal populations in a period of change. What remain largely unexplored is "the gender bias of the missiological studies and the ideology of evangelism."[3]

In this essay, I discuss different historical treatments of Naga conversion before turning to questions relevant for gender history. Recent events in Nagaland—especially the rhetoric and violence against implementing the provision of 33 percent reservation for women in local bodies – underline the importance of focusing on gender in history. Although the topics of masculinity and femininity -- as trope and performance – have received very little attention from historians, they emerge as major themes in the colonial and missionary encounter with the people of the Naga

[1] S.A. Perrine to Dr. Duncan (Oct 29, 1895), Microfilm of American Baptist Foreign Mission Society [ABFMS] Correspondence 1836-1900.
[2] Religion, Census of India 2001, http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/religion.aspx
[3] Suryasikha Pathak, "Home away from home: the work of missionary wives in the evangelical project in colonial Assam," Paper delivered at the South Asia Conference, Madison (Oct, 2008), 3.

Hills. Officials and missionaries pronounced the hill people "savages," but they also praised them for their bravery and tenacity. Military officers by definition lived masculine lives while missionaries constructed their "spiritual masculinity" as equal to that of the soldier-adventurer. In both cases, characterizing the Nagas as fierce opponents bolstered claims to masculinity. While Western men proved their bravery on the frontier, Western women demonstrated their commitment to Empire and faith by joining their menfolk in missionary work. In India, their concern was the "downtrodden Indian woman" who, they claimed, could only be saved by Christian women. In addition to conversion, their task was "to remake 'native' women into 'good wives and mothers' modeled on the norms of metropolitan and evangelical norms of femininity."[4]

Conversion

Missionaries were invited to the North East by the East India Company and supported by planters experimenting with tea growing. The Baptist missionary Miles Bronson (1812-1883) was the first to establish contact with the Namsanghea Nagas near Jaipur in 1838. With financial and military backing from East India Company officials and funds and assistance from tea planters,[5] Bronson supported the desire of Captain Francis Jenkins, Commissioner of the Governor General of India for Assam, to "get hold of the Nagas" and make them dependent on the British for their "livelihood and particularly for the administration of all their internal affairs."[6] The first armed British post in the Naga Hills was established at Samaguting in 1866; it was shifted to Wokha in 1875, and then to Kohima in 1878.

Older accounts of missionary activity in India (and other countries) dwell on the powerful faith of the missionaries often neglecting the political context and converted subject. Harriette Bronson Gunn, the daughter of Rev Bronson, wrote about her father's deep faith, the hardships he endured, and his devotion to preaching the gospel and distributing tracts to "ignorant idolaters."[7] Gunn does not refer to the British except when she mentions another "white" man who scared off hostile natives by firing his rifle, and the introduction of tea growing. Considering a later period, Joseph Puthenpurakal begins his discussion of the "pioneer" Baptists in the Naga Hills with Reverend E. W. Clark and his wife Mary, aided by Clark's Assamese assistant Godhula Rufus Brown without reference to the British presence.[8] While Robert Frykenberg gave Naga converts credit for conversion work, he downplayed the

[4] Jane Haggis, "Ironies of Emancipation: Changing Configurations of 'Women's Work' in the 'Mission of Sisterhood' to Indian Women," *Feminist Review* No. 65, (Summer, 2008): 110.
[5] See Section XII "Bronson and the Nagas," *The American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 AD): A Documentary Study,* Edited by H.K. Barpujari (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1986), 240-241.
[6] Miles Bronson to F. Jenkins, Namsang, Naga Hills (July 22, 1840), *The American Missionaries and North-East India*, 260.
[7] Harriette Bronson Gunn, *In A Far Country: A Story of Christian Heroism and Achievement* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 95.
[8] Joseph Puthenpurakal, Chapter II "The Clarks and Godhula Rufus Brown: Pioneer Baptist Missionaries to the Ao Nagas," *Baptist Missionaries in Nagaland: A Study in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1984), 54-89.

missionary-colonial connection and claimed the most successful missionaries were those who worked at some distance from colonial officials.[9] As a way of contextualizing missionary activity, Andrew May suggests addressing the North East as a frontier. This history would include "three focused and collaborative strands of inquiry": imperial governance, Christianity within this framework, and the impact of colonial experience on ecology and society.[10]

Rev E. W. Clark first traveled to the Naga hills in 1872 having received permission from the Commissioner of Assam Colonel Hepinson to begin proselytizing.[11] However, when he moved to Molungkimong in March of 1876, it was without the permission of the colonial government because, according to Mary Clark, they were "smarting from the recent rout of a large survey party sent to reconnoiter this territory and the brutal murder of Captain Butler."[12] In the following years, British reprisals marked the end of open warfare and the beginning of a period of pacification and the spread of "civilization" but not the end of all resistance.

While the missionaries benefitted from government protection and infrastructure, they were not always on the same page. Mary Mead Clark complained that converts withdrew their children from school to work to pay newly imposed taxes. She was indigent that some converts refused to keep the Sabbath, citing the English officials as examples. We had hoped, she wrote, that "certain heathen, barbarous, cruel customs" had ended but with the "English government failing to see eye to eye with the missionary, the restraint has been removed, and in some of these villages people are returning to revelries, carousals, cruelties . . .."[13] The British wanted the missionaries to help pacify the people while the missionaries wanted to "civilize" the Nagas. First, though, the missionaries believed it would be necessary to destroy everything associated with paganism. By the 1920s, British officers saw them as going too far. They denounced the missionary agenda as destructive and contrasted it with their aim of preserving Naga culture in a peaceful milieu.[14]

Richard Eaton, in an article that examines translation of sacred terms argues for the importance of viewing conversion as "creative adaptation" of the unfamiliar to what is already familiar rather than passive acceptance of a monolithic, outside

[9] Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Avarna and Adivasi Christians and Missions: A Paradigm for Understanding Christian Movements in India," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32, No 1, (January, 2008): 18.
[10] Andrew J. May, "'To Lay Down the Frontier of an Empire,' Circumscribing Identity in Northeast India," *Studies in History* 32, No 1, (2016):11.
[11] Bendangjungshi, *Confessing Christ in the Naga Context: Towards a Liberating Ecclesiology* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 40
[12] Mary Mead Clark, *A Corner in India* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 16.
[13] The Assam Conference, 1889, Molung, "Mrs. Clark writes:" quoted in A Bendangyabang. Ao, *History of Christianity in Nagaland: A Source Manual* (Mokochung, Nagaland: Shalom Ministry, 1998), 118-119.
[14] For example, see J.P. Mills, *The Ao Nagas* (Delhi: OUP, 1973) first published 1926, Appendix IV – The effects of Mission work upon the Ao, 410-423. Mills was Assistant Commissioner at Mokokchung for three years.

essence.[15] As he and others have pointed out, the major conversion of Nagas was by Nagas and happened after 1947 and India's expulsion of foreign missionaries in 1954.[16] Eaton argues that the words missionaries chose for proselytizing made a difference. For example, when Rev Clark and his assistants were translating Christian texts for the Ao, they had to decide on a word for God. The two obvious choices were the high god Lunkijingba, a god who lived high in the sky, remote from humans, and Lizaba, the creator of the earth, god of rain and hence essential to life. Clark chose neither but rather the word Tsumgen that means spirit but denoted no specific concepts.[17]

Other historians have focused attention on the pre-colonial religious beliefs of the Naga people. Missionaries and colonial officials denied Nagas had a religion, commenting that the rituals they observed were mainly concerned with propitiating deities found in nature and lacked theological ideas. In contrast, some contemporary authors argue the pre-Christian beliefs of the Nagas were remarkably similar to those introduced by the missionaries. For example, B.D.B. Moses[18] cites Phyveyi Dozo who compared Naga customs to those discussed in the Old Testament.[19] Moses does not agree with Dozo but calls attention to Naga beliefs and practices, for example, the concept of sin and need for expiation, which served as "cultural key[s] to prepare the way for the missionaries."[20]

Still other authors have applied the concept of "tribal trauma" calling attention to colonialism's destabilization of the culture, society, and economy. The British, justifying punitive expeditions that eliminated Naga resistance, called their history of relations with the Naga tribes: a sickening story of open insults and defiance, bold outrages and cold-blooded murders on the one side [Nagas], and [their own] long suffering forbearance, forgiveness, concession, and unlooked for favors on the other.[21] For the people affected, everything changed. Economically they were integrated into large economies, subject to taxation, and faced with a new medium of exchange. Pacified by violence, they became victims of new diseases. Religion brought education and medicine, offered help in negotiating a new universe, and provided an explanation for their misfortune as well as a message of hope. Frederick Downs characterized the Christian movement "as offering a means . . . to find and develop a satisfactory identity in the face of irresistible change imposed from without." [22]

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[15] Richard M. Eaton, "Comparative History as World History: Religious Conversion in Modern India," *Journal of World History* 8, No. 2, (Fall, 1997): 244.
[16] In 1941, only 18% of the population was Christian; in 1981, the percentage was 80%.
[17] Eaton, 257-60.
[18] B.D.B. Moses is the pseudonym of a missionary who writes on Christianity in India. The site *Moses on Missions* includes his writings. https://mosesonmissions.wordpress.com/
[19] B.D.B. Moses, "The Baptists of Nagaland" (posted April 30, 2008), *Moses on Missions*, https://mosesonmissions.wordpress.com/2008/04/30/the-baptists-of-nagaland/ [accessed June 14, 2017], 1.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] Lieutenant Colonel R.G. Woodthorpe, "Notes on the Wild Tribes Inhabiting the So-Called Naga Hills, on our Northeast Frontier of India," Meeting of the Anthropological Institute (Mar 8, 1881) in Verrier Elwin, Ed., *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 47.
[22] Frederick S. Downs, *Christianity in North East India: Historical Perspectives* (Delhi, 1983), 279.

While these are important interventions in the history of conversion, they ignore the gender of the missionaries and their converts, how contemporary notions of masculinity and femininity supported missionary activity, gender instruction by the missionaries, and Naga crafting of new gender identities. For example, women were invaluable to missionary enterprise since missions wanted "missionary couples," not single men.[23] As mentioned above, male missionaries frequently invoked the tropes of manliness and masculinity while female missionaries were essential to uplift the "downtrodden Indian woman."[24] In addition to the importance of gender to the colonial authorities, missionaries, and their converts, some historians assert that Naga patriarchy was reinforced by Western patriarchy.[25]

Masculinity

Research on women, gender and missions is extensive but research on male missionaries "has rarely focused on masculinity."[26] Kristin Fjelde Tjelle, the author of the 2014 monograph *Missionary Masculinity: 1870-1930: The Norwegian Missionaries in South-East Africa*, considers the construction of masculinity and the practice of masculinity from 1870, the beginning of the mission in Zululand, to 1930. As she makes clear throughout this study, masculinity is not a fixed category but rather "a cluster of cultural ideas and social practices that change over time (history) and space (culture)."[27] The biography, writings, and letters of the American Baptist Samuel Perrine, one of the earliest missionaries to enter the Naga hills, is especially useful for examining the theme of masculinity.

[23] Clare Midgley, "Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 45, No. 2, (April 2006): 339.
[24] Haggis, 109.
25 John C. B. Webster cites the work of Frederick Downs and Aphuno Chase Roy as arguing this position. John C. B. Webster, "Christian History as Indian Social History: A Review of the Literature," in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Ed. *Approaches to History: Essays in Indian Historiography* (Primus Books: 2011), 198.
[26] Kristin Fjelde Tjelle, *Missionary Masculinity: 1870-1930: The Norwegian Missionaries in South-East Africa* (UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014), 8.
[27] Tjelle, 1

Figure 1, Samuel and Rosa Perrine, Assam, c. 1892

Samuel Perrine and his wife Rosa traveled to Assam in 1892 and then to the Naga Hills to join Reverend and Mary Clark in Molung. By the time they arrived Clark and Godhula had set up schools and churches in several villages and Mary was teaching English. Although his successes were praised, it was common knowledge that Clark's converts often reverted to their pagan ways – drinking rice beer, attending festivals, eating opium, and consulting traditional healers.[28]

Writing about his arrival in the North East Perrine expressed shock at the wickedness, wretchedness and heathenism he found.[29] He came to the Naga hills without any knowledge of Ao Naga or Assamese and was only capable of teaching in the small English school begun by Mary Clark.[30] Fred Haggard arrived early in 1893 and with Perrine began to criticize Clark's work. Together they forced Clark to hand over to them all the work of the mission and then began to make changes. One of their first efforts was to force the pupils in the English class to wear Assamese dress;[31] next, they fired the Assamese teaching in the schools Clark had set up. These men, they claimed were poorly trained, casual about their duties, unwilling or unable to impose discipline on their flocks, and in some cases had established relationships with Naga women.[32] To the dismay of the teachers and many villagers, Perrine and Haggard shut down the village schools.

Their next target was the Molung church, where converts continued to pay deference to village leaders. Perrine and Haggard rearranged the church so these men would no longer be at the front of the congregation. Next, they developed a strict covenant and informed church members they would have to swear to obey its rules or leave. When the converts refused to give up rice beer, their church membership was revoked. The covenant was then extended to the other Ao churches, forcing them to close. In 1895, the native Christian population had shrunk from 75 to four (only one of whom was a Naga).

For Perrine and Haggard, self-styled "progressives," these measures were essential to ensure the converts were worthy Christians. They had completed their education and come of age in mid-century USA, just before the Civil War. The Church, historically dominated by men, had been increasingly feminized in the first half of the nineteenth century as men turned to science. The second half of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed efforts to reclaim the church for men and the emergence of "muscular Christianity," defined by Donald Hall as "an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the

[28] Christopher R. King, "The Emergence of Nagaland: A Social and Political Study of Imperial Administration, Missionary Influence, and Naga Responses," MA Thesis, History, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1969 (UM AWO K53 C556),49.
[29] Mary Clark, 131.
[30] E.W. Clark letter to __ (unreadable) (nd. 1893), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[31] Mary Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Sep 29, 1896), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[32] Puthenpurakal, 75.

world around oneself."[33] After the Civil War, Northern churches, which had supported the Union and Abolition, were ready for the new challenge of "winning America – and the world – for Christ."[34] With a renewed interest in missionary service, Sunday schools, other church organizations, and societies such as the YMCA encouraged young Protestant men to volunteer for service abroad. By the late nineteenth century, there was, Robert Handy wrote, a "growing feeling that Protestant Christianity was rapidly becoming the most important religious force in the world."[35]

Figure 3. The ideal Naga Christian man with his wife

North East India with its wild animals, headhunters, and inter-tribal warfare was a region that tested a missionary's strength, bravery, and faith. Once settled in the Naga hills, Perrine wrote extensively about the Naga Hills as a "wild, hard frontier"[36] that demanded stamina and courage. At the same time, he characterized the subjects of his missionary work as manly men. In justifying the move to Impur from Clark's station

[33] Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7. Hall is discussing T. C. Sanders' review of Charles Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857) for the *Saturday Review*.
[34] Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 274.
[35] Handy, 277.
[36] S.A. Perrine to the Assam Mission, (Dec 5, 1903), ABFMS Correspondence 1900-1919.

at Molung, Perrine claimed the missionaries would now be placed among the "finest people of the [Ao] tribe." These men were "sturdier and better in every way" than the Nagas living on the border who were susceptible to the "vices of the plains."[37] Clark's first converts, men living on the border between the hills and the plains, were, in Perrine's eyes, "regenerated but weaklings" like the Assamese.[38] However, the Nagas in the hinterland were "equal if not superior to the average American Christian."[39] The sub-text to Perrine's discussion of the Nagas was that they embodied the characteristics of the masculine primitive and conferred masculinity on those who worked with them.

The new Naga man was imagined by Perrine as fiercely devoted to the church, disciplined, confident, clean, sober, and faithful to his wife. Writing to his missionary colleagues, he marveled that men of "very limited capacity and training" became successful preachers and built strong and devoted congregations. However, he found temperance harder to enforce and despaired that his converts "don't know what cleanliness is." Far worse though were Naga attitudes regarding marriage. They change "wives with the wind or moon" Perrine wrote; it is the marriage question "that gives us the most trouble."[40]

Naga Men

Perrine's ideal was far from traditional Naga masculinity. Malcolm Cairns, drawing on S. Mayase's unpublished works on the Angami Nagas, and government and missionary accounts, asserts that warfare, headhunting, and protection of women were key elements of Naga masculinity.[41] The British brutally suppressed the Nagas, ending warfare and headhunting, as well as a man's ability to protect his family. However, we know very little about how individuals understood these momentous changes or the choices they made. We can, though, find evidence of Naga men asserting themselves as Christians in response to the many rules imposed by the missionaries.

The first example is drawn from the period when Perrine and Haggard wanted to reform the Ao church. According to Mary Clark, Perrine and Haggard's challenge to traditional habits of deference occasioned the first defiance. Perrine and Haggard wanted a "submissive" congregation and were exasperated that converts gave the elderly and powerful seats at the front in the church. Insisting that all were equal in the eyes of the Lord, they rearranged the seats and put the pulpit at the opposite end of the church. This resulted in a "battle" with the leading men of the village who refused to submit to the rules imposed by the young missionaries.[42] Perrine and Haggard then decided to make abstinence a condition of church membership. They

[37] S.A. Perrine to Dr. Duncan, (Mar 27, 1894), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[38] S.A. Perrine to Duncan, Oct 29, 1895. ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] S.A. Perrine to Fred Haggard, (Mar 31 1903), ABFMS Correspondence 1900-1919.
[41] Malcolm Cairns, *The Alder Managers: The Cultural Ecology of a Village in Nagaland, N.E. India*, Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University (March, 2007), 181.
[42] Mary Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Sep 29, 1896), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.

first insisted on interrogating members of the church about their consumption of alcohol. Finding this publicly humiliating, some fled. Others referenced wine drinking in the New Testament. In private letters, missionaries admitted their converts had taken their Bible lessons seriously and were correct in their interpretation. However, they would not budge on temperance. When Haggard and Perrine developed a new Covenant for the converts, Nagas stopped going to church preempting the authority of Perrine and Haggard to expel them.[43]

Soon after these reforms, Perrine and Haggard moved to Impur. At this point Caleph, a young man from Molung, formed a Christian Club and began preaching the gospel and temperance to his friends.[44] Without any input from the missionaries, Caleph's club disciplined members who drank rice beer, ate opium, or behaved immorally. Caleph worked with Zilli, the Assamese Christian teacher dismissed by Perrine and Haggard, to reconstruct the Molung Church. After Zilli was ordained, he baptized the new and returned Christians who promised they would abstain from intoxicating drinks and opium.[45] A contrite Perrine acknowledged this as a native movement and celebrated the victory for Christianity while admitting it undermined the influence and authority and of the missionaries.[46]

In these examples of the struggle over who would decide how the early church would operate, we find men leaving what they had come to value. Walking away from the church before they could be expelled, they declared ownership over the Christianity they had recently embraced. The men who argued with the missionaries about the gospels and wine drinking, and those who objected to an egalitarian seating plan were asserting a new masculinity. Caleph and his young followers became "warriors" for Christianity fighting for their faith against arrogant missionaries. They were baptized but on their own terms and by Zilli, the Assamese convert they had come to accept as one of their own.

Missionary women

In the USA, women were active in the Baptist missionary enterprise from the early nineteenth century. Their engagement was part of the larger movement of women's entrance into public life, a trend that authors like Michael Kimmel argue threatened conventions of masculinity. While wild animals and headhunters should have preserved the Naga Hills as a manly field, this was not the case. The growing number of wives, single missionary women, and women's financial support meant the gender challenge could not be avoided even in north eastern India.

Samuel Perrine had married Rosa Lamb, the daughter of a Baptist minister, in 1891. At the time Samuel applied for missionary service the application included a

[43] *Ibid.*
[44] F.S. Downs, *The Mighty Works of God: a brief history of the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India: the mission period, 1836-1950* (Gauhati: Christian Literature Centre, 1971), 115; E. W. Clark to Dr. Duncan, (1-10-1895), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900; *The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union: Fourth Triennial Conference*, 41.
[45] The problem was not with abstinence but whether it was a precondition to baptism (Perrine and Haggard's position) or a discipline imposed by the church members after baptism.
[46] S. A. Perrine to Dr. Duncan, Impur Camp, (Feb 12, 1897). ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.

series of questions about the applicant's wife. Beyond details like the date and place of birth and education, they asked about the woman's readiness for mission service and Samuel's referees praised his "excellent wife."[47] Rosa and other missionary wives were not missionaries in their own right but partners in two-person careers.[48] Men were expected to marry women and to select brides devoted to missionary service.

Between 1836 and 1870s, the "Pioneer Period" of the Baptist Mission in North East India, there were 18 women missionaries: 16 wives and two single women, Miles Bronson's sister and his daughter.[49] These two women were the exception since the Baptist Mission did not send single women to the field. Anna K. Scott found this out when she asked her pastor in Sherburne, New York, if she could join the mission. He replied "that they were not sending single ladies and I must 'await the openings of providence.' This meant I must wait until a man asked me to marry him."[50] It was not until after the establishment of the Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society in 1871 that the number of single women increased significantly. Pathak informs us that by the first decade of the 20th century single women dominated the American mission force.[51]

Missionary wives in the Naga Hills taught school, worked on translations, and sometimes accompanied their husbands on preaching tours while bearing and caring for children and trying to create "Christian homes." On one occasion, Perrine asked the ABFM to pay his wife Rosa $200 for some translations she had done. The Union responded that it did not and would not give grants to wives or because of wives. However, they recognized Rosa had done a great deal of work and agreed to pay Samuel the $200 in two installments.[52] Although they could not be paid, the labor of missionary wives was recognized as essential to the mission's work.

Single women, paid half as much as men, were even more valued as they were mobile and able to devote all their time to teaching and evangelizing. In 1873, Reverend Clark wrote to the ABFM secretary in Boston that since the Mission was short of funds, they should send missionary women to replace men who died in service.[53] His letters and those of his wife Mary Clark addressed the demand for *zenana* education in Assam and schools for Naga girls, the contributions of women missionary teachers and doctors, and the importance of baptizing girls and women to insure "Christian influence in the homes."[54] Even in the Naga Hills, Rev Clark argued,

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[47] Candidate File: Perrine, SA. American Baptist Historical Society, Mercer College.

[48] Hannah Papanek, **"**Men, Women, and Work: Reflections on the Two-Person Career," *American Journal of Sociology 78, No 4,* (Jan., 1973)**:** 852-872.

[49] L. M. Narola Imchen, "Women in Mission to Northeast India," *American Baptist Quarterly* 24, No 3, (2005): 243-44

[50] From Anna Kay Scott's *the Autobiography of Anna Kay Scott,* (Chicago, 1917), quoted by Imchen. 249.

[51] Pathak, "Home away from home," 3.

[52] Letter to Samuel Perrine from Fred Haggard, Assistant Secretary, (Jan 8, 1902), ABFMS Correspondence 1900-1919.

[53] Letter from Rev Clark to Rev J. W. Murdock, (Sep 8, 1873), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.

[54] Mary Clark to J.W. Murdock, (Aug 5, 1880). See also, Rev Clark to Murdock, (Jul 22, 1874); Rev Clark to ____ (unreadable) (Date unreadable, c. 1893); Rev Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Oct 16, 1895), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.

women were more reliable workers than adventurous young men. Analyzing the problems created by Perrine and Haggard, Clark wrote they "got tired of the work [teaching]" and in their eagerness to remake the mission, almost destroyed the labor of their predecessors. To rebuild, they did not need men who preferred the romance of touring to toiling in the school, but "a couple of good single ladies."[55] The fundamental work of the mission was to create books in Naga languages and teach children, tasks that were not appealing to ambitious young men but second nature to women. Send women, Clark pleaded: "two women with native helpers are ever so much better than one man."[56] His request was not inspired by feminism but came from a religious conviction that God endowed the sexes with different talents and character traits. Men were good at theology, women were not; men were easily bored while women could handle drudgery; and most important, the Creator intended women to be nurturers and educators of children.[57]

Naga Women

Women missionaries in the Naga hills frequently commented on how markedly tribal women's roles and conditions differed from those of women in other regions of India. Obsessed with female seclusion and their own construction of its meaning and rules, they marveled that Naga women moved freely. In Mary Clark's opinion "there is no degradation of the women among the Nagas."[58] Not all women missionaries agreed about degradation but they concurred that women moved freely and played a different role in hill society than on the plains. While thrilled with the ease of meeting and talking to Naga women, these missionary women were horrified with their nakedness, sexuality, and "performance of femininity."[59] For example, Mary Clark wrote about young women who "instigated" the men to engage in head hunting.[60] Determined to teach Naga women to be "good Christian wives," the missionary women privileged housework over work in the fields and tried to introduce Western notions of cooking, housekeeping, and childcare. As Suryasikha Pathak has noted, it is ironic that after marveling that Naga women were not subject to the restrictions they so abhorred in the plains, they wanted to restrict the freedom of these women and chain them to their homes.[61]

Within the women missionary's writings are hints of Naga women's biographies. Although the main aim of missionary education for girls was to produce wives for male converts, there is evidence of these women playing other roles. Mary Clark reported that at the 1899 meeting of the Naga Hills Association one woman talked

[55] Rev Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Oct 16, 1895), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[56] Rev Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Mar 18, 1896), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[57] Rev Clark to Dr. Duncan (July 6, 1896), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[58] Mary Clark, 49.
[59] Suryasikha Pathak, "Less Freedom Equals Emancipation: Femininity and Sexuality in Colonial Northeast India," paper presented at Association of Asian Studies Conference, Philadelphia (March, 2014).
[60] Mary Clark, 47.
[61] Pathak , "Less Freedom"

about the weekly prayer meetings held at her house.[62] At these meetings, the women discussed courtship, marriage, and divorce, and were spiritually uplifted. Mary Clark's first female convert was the schoolgirl Tungbangla**,** who, with her friend Noksangla, decided to be baptized. Tungbangla became a Bible woman and married a few years later. Unhappy

Figure 2. A Bible woman with a young girl. There is no evidence this is Tungbangla

with her husband, she applied to the village council for a divorce but was refused because she had married in the Christian church. Tungbangla stayed with her husband, moved to another village where she started a school and taught the Bible. Her pupils were baptized and soon the village built a church.[63] In her letter to Duncan about the arrogance of Perrine and Haggard, Mary Clark described the humiliation of Zilli's wife Jointa. Described by Clark as a "pure, refined, intelligent Christian woman," Jointa was publically interrogated by the reformist missionaries. Mortified by questions that she saw as casting aspersions on her character, Jointa burst into tears and fled the church.

[62] Mary Clark "Association at Impur," *The Helping Hand* 26, No 2, (Feb 1899): 3-4.
[63] Mary Clark, 86-87.

Figure 4. Rev Zilli, his wife Jointa and their three chidren.

The Nagas watching the drama were disgusted by this demonstration.[64] Unfortunately, the complete stories of these women are even more elusive than those of Naga men.

Conclusions

Theories of conversion have changed substantially in the last four decades. Earlier accounts that focused exclusively on the work of the missionaries treated their subjects as blank slates. More recent work, such as the examples mentioned above that examine translation, the role of education, and indigenous beliefs, begins to embody converts with agency. I am interested in moving a step closer to these individuals to try to understand the role and impact of gender in the missionary enterprise. This is far easier with male missionaries, as I have demonstrated using Perrine's letters, reports, articles, and photographs. We also know a great deal about the wives and female missionaries, especially those who wrote memoirs about their work and lives. [65]

Naga men and women are much harder to locate and understand. However, I think there is hope of finding in the missionary archives fragments to form the outlines of biography. These fragments can help us understand how people reacted to the missionaries, what ideas they accepted, how they modified them, and when they resisted.

I am also interested in understanding how the missionaries contributed to "patriarchal masculinity" beyond creating a church that was and continues to be dominated by men. In his letters to the Baptist Mission in Boston, Perrine praised

[64] Mary Clark to Dr. Duncan, (Sep 29, 1896), ABFMS Correspondence 1836-1900.
[65] Pathak, "Home away from home," 13-21.

Onen who became a teacher in the village of Waramong. When Perrine visited in 1903 he found one of the best church buildings he had seen in the hills with an equally impressive congregation of 50 members. Onen was responsible for both the well-built church and the "well behaved" congregation. As admirable as Onen seems to have been in developing a disciplined flock and building a church, his private life was not exemplary. After becoming a Christian, he returned to his village to get his fiancé who refused to come with him. Thwarted in this relationship, he eloped with the chief's daughter who he regularly "disciplined" on Sundays!

To a modern reader, suspicious of the difference between elopement and abduction and opposed to domestic violence, Onen does not seem the ideal Christian. Nevertheless, Perrine asserted the couple were devoted to each other and claimed Onen as one of the church's great successes. It is significant that women missionaries at this time listed "domestic abuse" as an evil custom that degraded women. They claimed that an American woman could expect "respect from her husband," while an Indian woman had to demonstrate "absolute reverence" for her spouse. Customs of seclusion were characterized as concealing stories of "injury and crime." [66] Interestingly, Cairns claims that Angami Nagas looked down on men who abused women, characterizing them as cowards who dominated the "weaker" sex because they were "not man enough to compete with other men." Abusers were viewed with contempt and found wanting in masculinity.[67]

In their official characterization of the encounter, missionaries ignored the non-violent resistance of Naga men over the interpretation of Christianity, the agency of Naga women, and unpaid work of their wives. Letters and other private communications provide glimpses of missionary women and Naga men and women going off script to complain, assert their rights, or withdraw from contact. These incidents, however incomplete as stories, are useful for understanding the impact of political and religious colonialism on gender roles and challenges to these impositions. This is important because the past has been characterized as heroic and masculine.[68] Until we can unpack the role of gender in this early period, it will be difficult to refute arguments that Naga society has always barred women from politics. Understanding gender construction in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries can play an important role in deconstructing myths that claim historical authenticity for present day attitudes.

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[66] Lucy Waterbusy Peabody, *Women's Rights in India* (Chicago: Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1917), Baptist Historical Society, File: Literature 1915-1919, 4.
[67] Cairns, fn 31,106.
[68] "Gender Justice in Naga Society- Naga Feminist Reflections: Dolly Kikon" *Kalifa* (Feb 25, 2017) First published in riaot.in, https://kafila.online/2017/02/25/gender-justice-in-naga-society-naga-feminist-reflections-dolly-kikon/ [Accessed June 16, 2017].