

CHAPTER IV

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSION IN THE NORTH EAST

When the Seventh-day Adventist Mission sent its first regular missionary to locate in Shillong in 1934, the other Protestant Christian Missions and the Catholic mission has been strongly established in this region. The Seventh-day Adventists were the late comers, and they had to begin their work amidst hardships and opposition.

A. Paving the Way to Establish the SDA Mission

The information of the first visit of the Seventh-day Adventist to Assam was from the account of F. O. Raymond. He was a colporteur who came to the North East (Assam at that time) in 1913 to sell religious books and magazines. He stayed in Shillong two months and gave a report on the beauty of Shillong, the capital of Assam. Regarding the people and the presence of other Protestant Christians he wrote:

"I had no idea that such a native Christian community existed anywhere in India. But here in these Khasi Hills, sixty miles from the nearest railway station, are two hundred thousand people of excellent character and natural ability, among whom the gospel has made phenomenal progress since the days of William Carey. There are now under the Welsh Presbyterian Mission thirty thousand Christians; and more intelligent, earnest, missionary people, -- simple, trusting, lovable, one could scarcely find. About two thousand of the best educated constitute several flourishing native churches in and close to Shillong, a large number holding clerkships in the government. I might add that the Khasis were really demon worshippers, and have never been bound by Hindu caste and customs."¹

¹F. O. Raymond, *The Eastern Tidings*, Assam, April, 1913, p. 11.

In his contact with this community that he had never experienced before he wrote:

"I seemed to be treading upon especially sacred ground, where I must had much and deal tenderly and truly with souls so trusting."² He mentioned of the kind and brotherly love shown by the European missionary and the native Christians."

Regarding to the sale of the literature that he brought, which has the Seventh-day Adventist message he wrote:

"Our best literature was freely purchased. I have the silent messengers to tell of the Saviour's soon coming and the special preparation necessary, and to make known the remnant people represented by the stranger missionary. . . . I am so glad for a small part in such blessed service. . . . My two months in the north-east province have revealed something of its extensive territory vast resources and bright prospect for soul saving (evangelizing). The situation demands that we as people can put into it, and that without delay."³

In 1917, F. O. Raymond reported of his visit to the tea gardens of Assam with books and magazines to sell. His main aim was to introduce the Seventh-day Adventist message with evangelistic purpose. He wrote:

"Four months . . . I was in the great tea country of the upper Brahmaputra valley where are to be found some 300 tea gardens under European management, employing from 500 to 5000 collies each. With a load of English books and magazines, I cycled 25 miles a day over all kinds of roads, going from garden to garden calling upon the manager, his Indian head clerk and doctor, and in case of the larger estates, upon one or two, or three European assistants. . . ."

While the majority of planters are quite irreligious and have little use for missionaries, I found some noble exceptions who were glad to secure 'Herald of the Morning', 'Great

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 12.

Controversy', etc. The educated Indians I found very ready to purchase 'Worlds Crisis', and to subscribe for 'Signs of the Times', and 'Herald of Health'.⁴

Regarding the general reception of those he came in contact with, he wrote that many Europeans bought books from him for their prestige in Assam, and partly because of their isolation from home districts in Bengal and elsewhere. Because of the hostile attitude that he received he continued:

"I have been made to realize that times are changing and that from now on God's messengers must expect to encounter obstacles unknown in the past."⁵

The Hardinges who were converted through a lady colporteur while in Calcutta were transferred to Assam in 1915.

Miriam Hardinges in 'the beginnings of Seventh-day Adventist work' in Assam which she wrote in the Southern Asia Tidings, gave us information that the Hardinges family were converted while in Calcutta. She wrote: . . . One day in 1915, Mr. Hardinge received word that the survey department of the government of India, for whom he worked, was about to transfer him to a more responsible position.

Mrs Hardinge hoped that it will be in the northwest as there was a good Seventh-day Adventist School, Vincent Hill, in Missouri, so they can send their two children Phyllis and Ivan to that school.

But it was not God's will. When the orders came, Mr. Hardinge was invited to be the officer-in-charge of the Assam Survey and Traverse party, with the responsibility of

⁴F. O. Raymond, India Union Tidings, July 15, 1917, p. 1.

⁵Ibid.

making revenue maps of the province of Assam, located eastward, an area that had never been completely surveyed. The family would live in Shillong, the capital of Assam.

Though they were disappointed of the transfer, yet they hoped for the best. Back in Calcutta Mr. Hardinge had made inquiries about the church in Shillong. They had so much enjoyed the fellowship in the Calcutta church and looked forward to being united with the Adventist family in their new station. "There is no church there," he was told. "Nor is there an Adventist in the whole of Assam", the mission added with regret. "No believers there at all - yet! you will be isolated members", he was informed.

So the Hardinge moved to Shillong in 1915, and did the best they could to witness for Christ in the circumstances. They subscribed to 'The Review and Herald', The Youth Instructor; and Our Little Friend and bought Adventist and other good books by Ellen White as they came out. In Shillong they made every Sabbath a special day for their family. On fine days they would seek out a beautiful spot beneath some trees, and have Sabbath School and take turns reading from papers and books, and they would hike in the beautiful hills around Shillong, especially beyond the Polo grounds.

On rare occasions, every three or four years, a pastor from the mission office in Calcutta would make the long trip to look up these isolated members and encourage them. Pastors Wilson, Wellman, Wyman and Raymond were given great welcome when they took the trouble to visit them. The Gilliards from Australia, and their family stayed in Shillong for a year, fostering the interests.⁶

⁶Miriam Hardinge, Southern Asia Tidings, October 1983, p. 4.

Between 1915 to 1934, there has been frequent visits of colporteurs who introduce the Adventist message through their books and magazines, along with that some engaged themselves in giving personal Bible studies to those who were interested.

In 1917-18, Mrs Burgess stayed in Shillong to sell books and magazines with the intention to do Bible work. In 1919, W. H. and D. Stevens spent their vacation in Shillong. They were giving Bible readings to apparently interested people.

The Stevens wrote: Shortly after arriving we became acquainted with a Tasmanian lady, and in course of time began Bible studies in her home twice a week. But each time as the hour for her study drew near, the clouds would gather and the rain would begin to descend. On two occasions, the rain was so heavy that Mrs. Stevens was prevented from going to her home. In spirit of the weather, however, the studies were faithfully presented.

As the lady's interest grew keener, we found her to be an apt Bible student. About three weeks ago, the cloudy visits were replaced by sunshiny farewell, I remarked, "We hope Mrs. Little that some day you will keep God's Sabbath with us." You may imagine our surprise and joy when she said, I have kept Sabbath for two weeks now, and intended to do so."

Another lady nearby, who has begun keeping the Sabbath, eagerly drank in the truth as it was presented to her. My first acquaintance with this lady was when I sold her a copy of Heralds, which has indeed proved to be the Herald of a new experience to her.⁷

⁷W. H. and D. Stevens, *India Union Tidings, A Word from Shillong*, July 1919, p. 7.

In 1919, L. J. Burgess report threw some information on the Hardinge religious activities, he wrote:

Last year the writer (L. J. Burgess) spent a couple of months in Shillong, at which time weekly meetings were held in the home of Brother Hardinges. They were attended by a goodly number of Brother and Sister Hardinge's friends and by others who had become interested through the efforts of Sister Raymond.⁸

Burgess also made mention of Brother and Sister Stevens who has been mentioned in the previous page, that they were active in holding Sabbath meetings, and Bible studies in the homes during the week. Their activities fostered interest in the minds of the people to hear the Adventist message.⁹

F. A. Wyman, a missionary stationed at Calcutta wrote of his visit to Shillong in 1920: "On Friday and Sabbath evenings, April 16th and 17th, I had the privilege of meeting with the believers in Shillong, at the home of Brother and Sister Hardinge. At the Sabbath service there were thirteen present. Some of these people have shown considerable interest in the Bible truths which have been taught by Brother and Sister Hardinge, and also by other of our workers who have spent a few weeks in the station. Wyman also made mention of the first baptism of two ladies conducted in a beautiful stream among the pine covered hills. He mentioned that these two sisters were both meeting with considerable opposition in their homes."¹⁰

⁸L. J. Burgess, *India Union Tidings*, July 1919, p. 6.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰F. A. Wyman, *Eastern Tidings*, May 15, 1920, p. 4.

In 1922, we have report of E. H. Guilliard. Because of the ill-health of his family in Calcutta, he has been asked to settle in Shillong for a time and open up work for the English-speaking community. According to him, Sabbath services were held at the home of Brother E. G. Hardinge, and Sabbath school at their home, and at each of these meetings there we always have some visitors.

Of his work and activities while in Shillong, Guilliard wrote: "I am also working with the "Signs" and have arranged for the use of the cinema theatre for Sunday evening services as soon as the weather permits."¹¹

In connection with the Guilliards, during this Shillong visit, H. E. Whyunny wrote: . . . Although the population of Shillong is not near as large as that of Darjeeling, nevertheless the prospects for our work look quite bright. Let us pray for Brother Guilliard's success.¹²

Through all these times the Hardinges, were not only faithful members of the Seventh-day Adventist church, but kept their hope alive while working to win souls. In the early part of 1924, Hardinge wrote to Pastor E. H. Guilliard at Calcutta stating, that, a Khasi man has accepted the truth and is meeting with them on the Sabbath. He desires to circulate our literature among his own people, and has already arrange for Brother Hardinge to address some meetings among them. Thus labour has opened in yet another tongue.¹³

In connection to this matter in the latter part of 1924, S. A. Wellman wrote: "Through the faithful efforts of Brother and Sister Hardinge, a Khasi brother, E. E. Dorum, accepted

¹¹E. H. Guilliard, *Eastern Tidings*, July 15, 1922, p. 5.

¹²H. E. Whyunny, *Eastern Tidings*, July 1, 1922, p. 9.

¹³E. H. Guilliard, *Eastern Tidings*, May 15, 1924, p. 6.

the truth some months ago, and he and Brother Hardinge have translated and printed a tract on Christ's second coming, and Brother Dorum is selling these among the Khasi people.¹⁴

The introduction of the Seventh-day Adventist message was done by such people, though the mission has not till this time sent any regular missionary to start the work among the Khasis. At this juncture, S. A. Wellman wrote that, the brethren and sisters in Shillong are praying that someone may be sent to start the work.

In 1928, the visiting Pastor Keller, baptized three people, an 84 years old man, Mr. Matthews, Lelsie, and Mervyn Hardinge in a stream call 'Wah Umkhrah' near the Polo ground. Then Mr. Dorum (an Anglo-Khasi) who had been accepting the message for quite sometime, was baptized later in the same year.¹⁵

The Hardinge has made a great contribution towards the beginning of the S. D. A. mission in Assam, through their life, time and effort. Mr. Hardinge exemplified his belief through his life. He was known as the Sahib who did not smoke or drink, did not eat meat and kept the Sabbath as his holy day.

He has been responsible in the printing of the first Adventist tract in Khasi, at his own cost, which he distributed everywhere he went on his survey trips.

The Hardinge desired to have a mission school to train young people. Before they left Assam in 1933 after retirement, they sold their house in Shillong, and turned in part of the

¹⁴S. A. Wellman, *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1925, p. 4.

¹⁵*Southern Asia Tidings*, October 1983, p. 5.

proceed to the mission towards a fund to establish a school, what was known as Assam Training School, Thadlaskein in Jaintia Hills.¹⁶

In the later part of 1931, Georgia Burrus (the lady who came to India in 1895 and started the work in Calcutta) who became Mrs. L. J. Burgess came to Assam with her husband Pastor L. J. Burgess. She did her last active work for India in these hills. After a lifetime of loving service devoted to the work in Bengal and Bihar, Elder and Mrs. Burgess retired to a little cottage on a hill side in the outskirts of Shillong, Assam. They named their little home "Pisgah" and settled there in the hope that they might occupy it until Jesus' return or until they should be laid to rest. However, after a time a turn of events caused their return to America, but before they left Shillong a growing interest had been aroused among the Khasi people.¹⁷

Of their work and stay in Shillong, L. J. Burgess after one year in this station wrote:

"It is perhaps time that we give the Tidings of brief report of the progress of the work in this new field. As most of you know, Shillong is the headquarters of the government of Assam in which province we have heretofore had no work established. It was this fact, in addition to the advantages of climate, that led us to locate here. Having been pioneers in India for the past 35 years, a new field has a special attraction for us . . ."

The Khasi language, spoken by the people of these hills, is quite different from any we have before learned in India, but we do not find it especially difficult and are fairly started on the way to a knowledge of it. Sister Burgess is giving Bible studies to a Khasi girl who

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷E. M. Meleen, *Half a Century of Progress*, pp. 128, 129.

comes several times a week and is also teaching the wife of our mali to read Khasi. This gives good practice in the language. Having several Bible studies in English, I have not put in as much time as otherwise in the study of the language but have made some progress. I have just finished the preparation of an eight page tract as a part of my language study. This has been sent to the press and we hope soon to have it for use. We hope soon to have another one ready on "Signs of Christ's Second Coming". . . Brother Hardinge has encouraged us in this line of work by paying the printer's bill.

On Sabbath our little company of nine meet together for worship. This includes one good Khasi lady who has fully decided to keep the Sabbath. She and her sister are making a thorough study of the message and we trust will soon be ready to help us give the message to others."¹⁸

Miss R. Fraser who visited Shillong in the early part of 1932 along with her sister to sell literatures wrote of the Burgess. She said: The Burgess live in an attractive cottage situated about four miles away (at Nongthymmai), on the outskirts of Shillong. She wrote that Brother and Sister Burgess are studying the Khasi dialect, and are able to converse sufficiently to be understood.¹⁹

The hand work of the Burgesses was rewarded with the baptism of a man and his wife belonging to the local Khasi tribe namely Mr and Mrs R. E. Raji. The two were baptized by Pastor Burgess.²⁰

¹⁸L. J. Burgess, *Eastern Tidings*, September 15, 1932, p. 7.

¹⁹R. Fraser, *Eastern Tidings*, May 1932, p. 11.

²⁰H. Zairemthanga, *The Coming of the SDA Message to the North East*, p. 1.

Pastor and Mrs W. A. Barlow came to Shillong in the early part of 1933; Pastor and Mrs C. A. Larsen came in the early part of 1934. W. A. Barlow was a literature Evangelist, selling many books and magazines and distributing free tracts with the hope that through the literatures the people will know the gospel truth and be won to Christ.

Pastor and Mrs Larsen came to help the Burgesses and they too settled down to the study of Khasi language to prepare them for the work among the Khasi people.²¹ The Burgess left Assam in the early part of 1935.

B. The Mission in Khasi and Jaintia Hills

Pastor and Mrs L. J. Burgess came to Shillong with a thought to settle among the Khasi people permanently. They had a little cottage in Shillong and name it "Pisgah". However, due to ill-health condition of Mrs. Burgess, they were compelled to leave for their homeland at the close of 1934.

Before the Burgesses left Shillong a growing interest had been aroused among the Khasi people. Seeing the need of the hour and in response to the many requests of the few believers in Khasi Hills. The Seventh-day Adventist mission approved to send J. F. Ashlock to establish the work in Assam, with a headquarters in Shillong.

The believers in Shillong were in the words of W. A. Barlow, "looking out daily for Brother Ashlock and family and hope that they will soon arrive in Shillong for beginning work in the Khasi Hills."²²

²¹G. G. Lowry, Eastern Tidings, November 1, 1934, p. 6; Eastern Tidings, July 15, 1934.

²²W. a. Barlow, Eastern Tidings, July 1, 1935, p. 6.

Pastor and Mrs J. F. Ashlock joyfully responded to the call of service. On arrival in Shillong they immediately got busy in the work. They both spent much time in learning the Khasi language, and in evangelism.

The harvest is ripe but the labourers are few, wrote H. G. Woodward; who came to visit these areas from Calcutta. Brother Ashlock has but one assistant whose time is, to a great extent spent in translating. But the greatest need is a permanent location. Owing to the bitter opposition to the Adventist work, it seemed well nigh impossible to rent suitable accommodation.

However, the Ashlocks were lucky to find a very nice bungalow in a nice part of the town (Laitumkhrah). Part of his bungalow is in use as a reading room and meeting hall. The reason that he was allowed to locate in this building was on account of the fact that the place is reputed to be haunted. As the property has ample space for the erection of a church building, it was proposed that the property be secured by the mission.²³

The first mission property was secured on December 2, 1937. When Mr and Mrs Kumar Adkhikari, the Extra Assistant conservator of Forests, Assam, sold the 44,000 sq. ft. plot of land, located at Laitumkhrah to the Seventh-day Adventist for Rs.8,800.00.²⁴

The Ashlocks learned the language so well in a short time, that they could conduct Sabbath School and preach in Khasi language by 1936.

In the report of R. H. Loasby, the Superintendent of the Northeast India Union located at Baragain, Ranchi. We gather that, Pastor J. F. Ashlock, was aggressive in the work, he

²³H. G. Woodward, *Eastern Tidings*, October 1936, p. 3.

²⁴Sales Deed, Santana, December 2, 1983.

has never been contented to rest satisfied with making efforts (evangelistic meetings) for the town of Shillong alone, but has, in a number of cases, extended his work for into the surrounding districts. He has entered a number of hill territories, particularly the Jaintia and Garo Hills. Together with Brother Rajee and other faithful helpers he has spent days, or weeks as the case may be, in reaching these mountain people, many of whom were very responsive to the message.²⁵

In 1937 Pastor and Mrs O. W. Lange, the American missionaries, was released from their work in Western India to help Pastor J. F. Ashlock in an evangelistic effort in Shillong. The Langes left Shillong shortly only to return again in 1939 to begin their memorable work in the Khasi Jaintia Hills together with the Ashlocks. It was these two missionaries families the Ashlocks and the Langes that were directly responsible for the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist mission and its growth not only in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but their activities had much influence and resulted in the establishment and growth of the mission in other parts of the Northeastern states.²⁶

Though the meetings were still being held in one of the rooms in the Ashlocks Bungalow, yet because the believers were matured enough to take the responsibilities of the church, ~~and~~ the baptized members has increased to 25. This company was organized into a church on June 4, 1938. So the Seventh-day Adventist church in Shillong, became the first organized church in the Northeast.

²⁵F. H. Loasby, Eastern Tidings, July 1, 1938

²⁶N. C. Wilson, Eastern Tidings, September 1, 1937, p. 7.

J. F. Ashlock felt that the organization of the Shillong Church brought blessings to the members and caused several interested ones to ask for baptism.

In 1938, F. H. Loasby, the Superintendent of Northeast India Union made a report that the Division has appropriated Rs.7,000.00 for the church building, and in October, he reported, that his visit to Assam was mainly to prepare plans for the proposed Shillong church building, as these plans must be submitted to the authorities for necessary permission.

In his next visit, Loasby reported in November 1939, that his object in going to Shillong at this time was to get the work started on the new church building, which is so badly needed. It has not been any easy task in view of the different kinds of regulations and prohibitions existing in a place like Shillong; but finally we have things going, and in spite of uncertainties of prices, and, in most cases, the increase of prices, due to the war, we believe we shall just manage to get our church building up, although, perhaps not very fully equipped, with the money we have in hand.²⁷

Looking at the need of a school, which was running that year itself in 1939 in a little out-house building on the mission premises. A plan was made to create a set of basement rooms to be used for a church school taking advantage of the height of the piers 8 to 10 feet which supported the church building.

²⁷F. H. Loasby, *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1939, p. 5.

The foundations for the new church in Shillong was laid in November 1939, another Rs.2,500 came in through contributions of brethren from abroad for the completion of the building.²⁸

The return of Pastor and Mrs O. W. Lange to India in July 1939 greatly helped the work. Both the Ashlocks and the Langes launched out many evangelistic efforts and missionary outreach to win people to Christ.

At this juncture a school in Shillong was opened with the objective of educating the member's children who were facing Sabbath (Saturday) problem by attending other schools and to introduce evangelism through children.²⁹

In 1941, Pr and Mrs Lange were sent to Jowai to begin what was to be known later as the Assam Training School. The school was conducted in rented rooms. The school opened with nineteen students in the lower classes and thirteen students in class seven to nine. The school proved to be a great blessing to the evangelistic work of the church not only in Khasi Jaintia Hills, but in the whole Northeast. In 1941, the school was situated in Jowai itself, which was shifted in 1942 to a better location at Thadlaskein about four miles away on the Shillong-Jowai road.³⁰

From these centres of evangelism the mission introduced its message and raised churches in various places.

²⁸Ibid., November 1, 1939, p. 6.

²⁹Ibid., p. 7.

³⁰O. W. Lange, *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1942, p. 3.

C. The Mission in Mizoram

That which claims the major interest of the missionaries in the Mizo people was their attitude toward religion. In about half a century the work and influence of the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries turned the majority of them in the north (Lushai Hills) toward nominal Christianity, while in the south the work of the Baptists bore similar results.

The cooperating and independent spirit that the Mizo people exhibits can be seen through the Christian community raised up in any village. They build, equip, and maintain their houses of worship without depending on foreign money or foreign leaders. The members of church groups take turns in carrying church leadership responsibilities.

Seeing this type of self-reliance and independent spirit during his tour, E. M. Meleen the visiting Seventh-day Adventist missionary wrote:

"With such a spirit and attitude and by such methods of prosecuting evangelical work there is no limit to the extent to which it may be expanded, when there is almost complete independence on financial support from some extraneous source. It is this spirit and attitude that has enabled a very small handful of foreign missionaries to expand their work in this entire hill section and turn the great majority of the population toward Christianity. . . This self-reliance and independence is not due to economic advantages for the people are as poor as any in any part of India, and very little money circulates a month them -- it is due to the spirit within them."³¹

In regard to various Christian faith that they professed to have, E. M. Meleen observed that many of them were not satisfied with their quality of Christianity and Christian doctrine. They have found that some Bible truths have been withheld from them, and have become enthusiastic and even fanatical when something new is revealed or when some

³¹E. M. Meleen, *Eastern Tidings*, December 1, 1949, p. 4.

new unusual interpretation is given to Scriptural statements. Probably, this is in part an explanation for the fact that many Christian denominations were found, even before the Seventh-day Adventist mission entered the Lushai Hills. ". . . Certain extreme and bizarre types of religious manifestations find among these people a fruitful field. Holy Rollerism, extreme type of Pentecostalism, something called Revivalism, and other types of faiths. All of which required shouting, much noise, shivering, shaking, beating the air with the arms, dancing jumping, and other physical acrobatics in their practice, make a strong appeal even among the members of the sobers and almost sombre Welsh Presbyterian churches."³²

By this time not all of the Bible has been translated and published in Lushai language, but, what impressed the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries was their eagerness to learn. They spend much time in reading and discussing the Scriptures which they have, with one another. When something which they have not known before was brought to light, they seemed unusually ready to accept it. This trait makes the Lushai Hills, a promising field for the propagation of the Seventh-day Adventist message. Which the missionaries saw must be exploited without further delay.³³

However, it was, not easy to enter the Lushai hills immediately by the missionaries or other Christian missionaries aside from the Welsh Presbyterian mission. The government was not in favour to have many other Christian denominations, this was the case before independence especially.

³²Ibid.

³³E. M. Meleen, Eastern Tidings, December 1, 1949.

The above reason for restriction to preach in certain areas, led the Seventh-day Adventist mission to realize the importance of a boarding school to teach the young people of the Adventist message and then to train them, so they can go back and work among their people. To realize this objective, the Assam Training School was started in 1941. F. H. Loasby wrote in 1942:

"Many parents have applied to enrol their children and young people in our school, many of them are from the Lushai Hills, where our missionaries are not allowed to go to preach, but in this way we expect to get the message to them."³⁴

1. *Paving the Way for Pioneering Work*

It will be worthwhile for historical account to note how the Seventh-day Adventist message came to Mizoram.

Lallianzuala Sailo was the first Mizo man who came to contact with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Sailo's were the ruling family among the Mizos before the Independence of India. Every village was under the domination of the Sailo Chief. Hualter village too was ruled by a Sailo Chief named Lahlinga Sailo, the father of Lallianzuala Sailo, who was born on August 23, 1922. It was then the practice of the British Government to encourage the sons of the village chief's to get school education by granting them special scholarship. Lallianzuala, being the Chief's son was privileged to go to Shillong for education.

³⁴F. H. Loasby, *Eastern Tidings*, May 1, p. 7.

To go to Shillong he had to walk about 100 miles to the railway station in Silchar. Finally, he reached Shillong after a journey of seven days. He arrived Shillong in 1939. He was enrolled in the Government High School, and resided at Earl Hostel.

While studying in Class IX in 1941, he heard people were talking about a certain peculiar group of people who worship Satan and attending church on Saturday instead of Sunday. What he heard aroused his curiosity and desire to see those people by himself. One Saturday in January 1941, he went out to see for himself the worshippers of Satan.

After an hour of walking he came across one new church at Nonthymmai, Shillong. As he was standing near the church building, he saw two foreign ladies with folding chairs in their hands coming towards the church. Immediately he helped them carrying the chairs into the church. In the course of his conversation with these two ladies he had the impression that they might be the strange Saturday keepers who worship Satan. The ladies left for a nearby house, while he sat on the steps outside of the church. Presently he saw well dressed children coming towards the church followed by a very fine, good looking and well dressed gentleman in black suits. The gentleman politely greeted and invited him to attend the Sabbath meetings which he gladly accepted to satisfy his curiosity.

The good impression that he got from the meeting was unexpected. Instead of making fun and mocking at these people, he returned to the hostel with a sense of happiness and new found joy, because of what he heard and experienced that day with those Saturday keepers. This eventful Saturday (Sabbath) morning was the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist church history in Mizoram.³⁵

³⁵H. Darrikhuma, *The Origin of Adventists in Mizo Hills*, June 1969.

Later on Lallianzuala discovered that the two ladies with the chairs were Mrs Ashlock and Mrs Lange, and the gentleman with the black suit was Pastor J. F. Ashlock.

From that time onward he attended the meetings and Bible classes regularly. His main intention was to know why these people keep Saturday instead of Sunday as the Sabbath. He soon found out after careful Bible studies with the missionary, Pastor J. F. Ashlock. He then began keeping the Saturday Sabbath from March 1941.

The Assam Training School in Jowai opened that very year 1941. Lallianzuala visited ATS in the month of March, accompanying Pastor O. W. Lange, its first Principal. As they were resting under the pine trees, Pastor Lange unfolded the future plans of the mission to build a school at that very site. Lallianzuala offered to be the first student of the Assam Training School.

Forfeiting the scholarship granted by the Government and leaving behind the Government High School in Shillong, he got transferred to Assam Training School in April 1941 to be its first student.

Not long after this he suffered from an enteric fever and was admitted to the Welsh Presbyterian Hospital, Jowai, he was discharge on November 6, 1941. The kindness and parental care that he received from Pastor and Mrs Lange helped him all through those times of suffering. He was baptized on November 28, 1941, and became the first Seventh-day Adventist among the Mizos. On the reaction against his conversion from his former brethren, he wrote:

"My former brethren in the Lushai Hills published an article against me in the "Lushai Herald," saying that I had lost my reason and had joined a peculiar denomination, and that I was like a prodigal son who had turned ungrateful."³⁶

³⁶Lallianzuala Sailo, *Northeast Special*, December 1, 1946, p. 2.

During that winter vacation, January to March 1942 he went home and taught the people of his new religion. While in Class X in 1942, under the guidance of Pastor Lange, he translated a book called Kristian Thurinte (Christian Doctrine) from English to Mizo, which was printed in Shillong. In January 1943, Lallianzuala returned to Mizoram with 500 copies of his translated book. The book were all sold out during the vacation. It was the first book published in Mizo language that tells of the Adventist message to the people.

Before leaving the school, the principal told him to come back and bring fifteen new students from Lushai Hills (Mizoram).

The remarkable changes in the character of Lallianzuala impressed the people that many parents decided to send their children to Assam Training School. At the end of the vacation 25 new Mizo students, including one girl, Ngurkungi Sailo went along with him to the boarding school. Seven of them were baptized in 1944 at Assam Training School.³⁷

It is interesting to note that two of these 25 new students later became leaders in the church. One of them was Lalkhawliana, who became the first ordained Pastor among the Mizos, and L. Hmingliana became the first Mizo Section President and later the first President of the Northeast India Union of the Seventh-day Adventists.

Lallianzuala taught at the boarding school for sometime. Then he attended Spicer Memorial College, Pune, for higher education. In November 1944, six Mizo students of Assam Training School were baptized and among them was the only girl from the Lushai Hills, Ngurkungi Sailo.³⁸

³⁷Ibid., p. 3.

³⁸H. B. Lalkhawliana, Hand Written Manuscript, Aizawl, 1992. The writer was among the first batch to be educated at Assam Training School, Jowai. He became the first ordained minister and a pioneer in the work in Manipur and Garo Hills.

2. *The Beginning of Seventh-day Adventist Presence in Mizoram*

Since Lushai Hills came under the jurisdiction of a "restricted area" one of the Seventh-day Adventists foreign missionaries or non-Lushai were permitted to work there. However, it was only the Welsh Presbyterian mission that were permitted to work in Lushai Hills. The Baptists also worked in South Lushai Hills. No other foreign missionaries were allowed aside of these.

Though the Seventh-day Adventist missionaries were not permitted to work in the Lushai Hills, the mission founded a way to work through the students who studied and were converted in Assam Training School. They were the ones who carried the message, and through them the work began to grow.

Regarding this R. S. Fernando wrote: "All that was done is to circulate a tract in the Lushai language and distribute the school prospectus through one of the Lushai boys who studied in the school. . . So we hope through the boys and girls now studying at the Assam Training School to preach the advent message in the Lushai Hills."³⁹

Lallianzuala returned to Mizoram from November 1944 to March 1945. In spite of the objection made by the British officer, a superintendent of Mizo Hills, he continued to work, selling literature and preaching.

Pastor O. W. Lange was the first Seventh-day Adventist foreign missionary who was permitted to enter Lushai Hills. Permission was given to him for two weeks in 1944:

³⁹R. S. Fernando, *Eastern Tidings*, July 15, 1944, p. 6.

during that time he visited the parents of his students. Again in 1946, Pastor G. Hoag spent three days in Aizawl.⁴⁰

In 1944 some of the A. T. S. students conducted the first Sabbath School in Mizoram. To further strengthen the spread of the message, the mission authorized Lallianzuala to translate more books, such as the "Present Truth" and "An Hour with your Bible". The students of A. T. S. were given training for canvassing to sell books.

After reading those books sold by the students of A. T. S. many Mizo people began to make inquiry about the true doctrines and teachings of the Bible, some even wrote letters to Lallianzuala who by 1945 was working as one of the staff of A. T. S., inquiry about the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. Because of these calls; the mission sent him as the first full evangelist to Mizoram, in November 1946.

From the information gathered, it is clearly seen that the message of the Seventh-day Adventist mission entered Mizoram through the students of A. T. S., and Christian literature.⁴¹

3. First Church Organization

The book "Kristian Thurinte" (Christian Doctrine) was instrumental in bringing about the beginning of the S D A presence in Zokhawang village. Where the first SDA Church was constructed and organized.

⁴⁰Lallianzuala Sailo, Northeast Special, December 1, 1946, p. 2.

⁴¹H. Zairemthanga, The Coming of S D A Message to Northeast, p. 6.

A man by the name of Ronghihlova known as Pu Rova received the message through the book. He began to teach others about his new found faith. He and his wife started keeping the Sabbath (Saturday) in 1946.

In 1947, another young man, Thanghuta, Lahlimpuai and Lalengliana joined the SDA Church. Lianzuala Sailo, the evangelist visited them often to strengthen their faith. These first believers had much difficulties since all the villagers were Presbyterian Christians, who could not tolerate other Christian denomination to spring up in their midst. However, in spite of the curses and abuses, the SDA company grew in membership.

In 1948, under the supervision of Lallianzuala Sailo, the first church building of the Seventh-day Adventist was constructed. The building materials were bamboos, wood and thatch, the builders were the new converts, they built it without receiving any financial aid from the mission.⁴²

In 1948, Pastor C Jensen came to visit Aizawl. During this visit he conducted the first baptismal service in Mizoram, in which seven men were baptized, namely: Rova, Biakthanga, Lalenga, Thanghuta, Biakchhunga and Denga. The baptismal service attracted many curious spectators as they have never seen such proceeding before. The talk of Aizawl town for a few days after that was of those seven men and the baptism. The new converts had to go through opposition and jeering from others, who make fun of their new found faith and were sure that their church will not last, as being only the local church, having no foreign missionaries to guide the church. However, not long after this, the visit of a group of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries including Pastor O. W. Skav, O. W.

⁴²Ibid., p. 7.

Lange, J. F. Ashlock and E. M. Meleen, silenced the critics. In fact, they were very much impressed by the height of these tall American Missionaries.

In 1949, Pastor W. G. Lowry inaugurated the first church at Zokhawzang to be the first organized church in Mizoram, and Biakchhunga was elected as its first ordained elder. Thus Zokhawzang will be remembered as the birth place of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Mizoram.

The second church was erected at Khawchhete village, the third one at Lungleng village. Lallianzuala and L. Hmingliana supervised the work in these areas. These three villages were located near Aizawl town.

In South Mizoram the work spread through ATS students, like Saikhuma, Biakchhawna, and Lalthangliana. The evangelist Lianzuala made extensive tour in this area, and gave Bible studies whenever he gets the opportunity to do so.

Puipui village became the centre of the Seventh-day Adventist movement in South Mizoram. A church building was constructed in this village in 1940.⁴³

4. The Only SDA Foreign Missionary

E. M. Meleen who was one of the visiting missionaries in 1948, wrote "A bit of scouting was done in Aijal to look out for an acceptable location for a headquarters to be established in this territory. A lovely ridge several acres in extent, seems to have been kept in reserve for us. When the administrative officer was told of our wishes, he assured Pastor Ashlock and Lange that he would make it available to us as soon as we are prepared

⁴³Ibid., p. 8.

to occupy it. It appealed to us as being as fine a site as there is in Aijal. If obtained, there will be room on that hill top for a meeting house, workers cottages, gardens, and some for grazing a cow or two. We trust that this visit and that which has already been done may be the beginning of a permanent work in the Lushai Hills.⁴⁴

The hope and aspiration of the missionaries to firmly establish a permanent work in the Lushai Hills became a reality on December 13, 1949.

Pastor and Mrs W. G. Lowry received a call from the General Conference to be the pioneer missionary in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram). They took the challenge and responded to the call. They arrived Calcutta in August 1949 -- after a long and difficult voyage on the sea. They were held in Calcutta for a while until they obtained the entry permit from the Government to proceed to the Lushai Hills. They arrived Aizawl on December 13, 1949 along with their son Eric and daughter Caroline, Eleven and nine years old respectively.⁴⁵

When the Lowrys arrived, there was no quarter prepared for them. They had to occupy Lallianzuala's new kitchen which was overloaded with themselves and their properties. However, they endured all these hardships and discomforts cheerfully.

The presence of the foreign missionary was indeed a great inspiration and encouragement for the new believers. Pastor W. G. Lowry, immediately took up the work in preparing Sabbath School Lessons in the local language, with the help of some English speaking workers.

⁴⁴E. M. Meleen, *Eastern Tidings*, January 1, 1948, p. 4.

⁴⁵H. Zairemthanga, *The Coming of SDA Message to the Northeast*, p. 8.

As there were no motorable roads, he walked on foot from village to village, with posters carrying his clothing and food that could last him for many weeks. He was known as a "Roving Missionary" because of his travelling. He conducted meetings and Bible studies in many villages. His theological knowledge impressed the people very much. He served in the Lushai Hills for 15 years. They were years of progress and change for the Seventh-day Adventist mission. He left Mizoram in December 1964.

The permanent site which the Administrative officer promised to Pastor Ashlock and Lange was finally secured through the help of Mr. Barkataki, the then Superintendent of Lushai Hills. The location was known as Seventh-day Tlang (Seventh-day Hill) or Nisarih Tlang. Land lease of this headquarters was obtained in 1951. It was on this hill that Pr. Lowry built a bungalow. It was built by steel and iron frame fittings, cement concrete was also used. The building became an attraction to the people of Aizawl as they have never seen such building before.

The work of Pastor Lowry was mainly evangelistic. He strengthened the existing churches and did much to direct the work for growth and expansion of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.⁴⁶

Shortly after their arrival in Aizawl, the Lowrys were invited by Mr Lalrina Sailo, the assistant Superintendent of Lushai Hills (Mizoram) and a relative of Mr. Lallianzuala Sailo, to attend a Christmas party. Mr Barkataki, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills was also present in the party. In the course of their conversation, Mr. Barkataki asked Mrs. Lowry as to how they were going to educate their children, because there was no English

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 11.

medium school in Lushai Hills. Mrs. Lowry told him that she would teach them herself. She did not expect him to take her word seriously.

Mr. Barkataki told her to open a school, and begin on January 17, 1950. when Mrs Lowry told him that she cannot do it immediately because she has no classroom, benches, textbooks and all the needful things to start a school. However, Mr. Barkataki insisted so much and he offered to meet all those needs, and not only that, he sent his children to the school, the Assam Rifles officers' and other high ranking officers also sent their children to Mrs. Lowry's school which began on January 17, 1950 in the bungalow of the district superintendent. Today the bungalow is the residence of the Governor of Mizoram.

The school was shifted to Lownier temporary building at Mr Lallianzuala's place, now known as Republic Veng; when the children of Mr. Barkataki suffered from chicken pox.

The progress of the school satisfied the superintendent, so much so that he encouraged Mrs. Lowry to have a permanent building for English Medium School along with their headquarters. With this encouragement, he also helped them to secure a permanent place at Nisarih Tlang. The Seventh-day School was renamed after its found as Helen Lowry School. It became a full-fledged high school in 1975.

With the establishment of Helen Lowry School the mission became popular and thus it helped in the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mizoram.

5. *Growth and Reorganization of the Work*

As the work progress, more and more members were added to the church. More workers were employed as the needs increased. Churches were raised in many villages, and evangelists and pastors were employed to look after them.

As the work in Mizoram grew in strength and increased in membership, it became increasingly difficult to direct the administration from Shillong, the headquarters of Assam Mission because of the distance. Therefore, the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventist granted permission to turn Mizoram into a Section, with its own administrative officers to direct the work in Mizoram. So Mizoram Section was created within the framework of the Northeast India Union in 1976 with its headquarters at Aizawl. Pastor L. Hmingliana was its first President.⁴⁷

D. The Mission entered Manipur

Five or six years earlier, before the coming of the first Adventist Missionary to Manipur in 1952, when Pastor O. W. Lange was Principal of Assam Training School, he and the students secured the names and addresses of English-reading people among the different hill tribes in Assam and Manipur. To these people the school mailed 'Signs of the Times', magazines and later, when contact had been established, enrolled many in the 20th century Bible course. Some of those enrolled in the Bible course were school teachers and government officials, and still others were connected with another mission society.

To enter Naga Hills District during those days, one must obtain special government permission. For many years the Baptist mission has established its work in this district, and when they found that some of their workers were studying the Adventist doctrines, they induced them to discontinue the course.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp., 11, 12.

Mr Ninghei Luikham was an active member of the Baptist church, a man who thirsted for the truth and more light, at this time he was one of the leaders of the organization called "Reform Christian Church." He got hold of a book, "Bible Readings for the Home Circle" from one Mr Luikai of Phungcham village. The book gave him much help in Bible studies and in leading out his new found organization.⁴⁸

At about the same time, Ninghei's son, Benjamin who was studying in Shillong, bought a book called "Guide to Better Day". After reading this book he was convinced of its teachings regarding the Seventh-day Sabbath. He shared this book with his father, who appreciated very much for the light that it brought him.⁴⁹

1. *Beginning of Adventism in Ukhrul*

There were various reasons given for the creation of this new organization which was called the Reform Church and which resulted in the entry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ukhrul.

According to the Baptist source; it says: "At the close of the forties, there was a celebration at Ukhrul of the Manipur Baptist Golden Jubilee. The organisation of the Jubilee was entrusted to the local leaders at Ukhrul. After the Jubilee when the local church audited the accounts of the fund, it was found that mishandling of money had occurred. A crisis arose and a group from the local church separated over the issue and established a parallel local church. The ensuing matter of the recognition of the parallel

⁴⁸N. O. Dahlstan, Eastern Tidings, July 1, 1952, p. 5.

⁴⁹Ninghei Luikham, Growth and Development of SDA in Manipur and Nagaland 1977, p. 8. An unpublished report to the jubilee celebration at Imphal in 1977.

local church became very sensitive and resulted in an invitation by the parallel local church to the Seventh-day Adventists to come to Ukhrul and establish their church there.⁵⁰

According to Ninghei Luikham, the leader of the "Reform Christians", which at that time number 845 in ten churches in Tangkhul area. He said that the reason for the split, was because the high ranking leaders of the church were not doing things in line with the teachings of the Bible. When pointed out, they neither tried to reason nor were they willing to make things right. Therefore, it was necessary to bring about some reformation in the church. The aim and object of the reform was that:

1. All workers and laymen should pay tithe just alike faithfully.
2. A man cannot be a church leader when he puts away his wedded wife without any fault of the wife and living with another woman.
3. There should not be tax or compulsory money collection for evangelistic fund.
4. Mission workers should not involve in political affairs.
5. In religious field, Bible should be the guide rather than the majority votes.
6. Mission workers should not go after side income such as contract work or government job.⁵¹

This research paper is not in position to make judgement on whose argument and reason is to be accepted as correct. But the result of this conflict brought the Seventh-day Adventist mission into the picture, and paved the way for its growth and development.

However, it is important to note that Ninghei Luikham, the leader of the split group,

⁵⁰Champhang Jojo, *Christian Life in a Tribal Context: in Manipur*, pp. 46, 47.

⁵¹N. Luikham, *Growth and Development of SDA*, p. 7.

secured a copy of "Bible Readings for the Home Circle" which is a Seventh-day Adventist book and the reading of this book caused him to seek for more Bible knowledge. He found the address on the discarded envelope of the "20th Century Bible Correspondence Course" which he had taken years before, but did not complete due to the objection of the church leaders. Early in 1951, he wrote a letter to the Assam Training School. In this letter he said he had learned about the Sabbath and that he was going to teach it to the people. Correspondence developed with the principal and later with the N. V. Dahlsten, the then President of Assam Mission at Shillong.

N. Luikham wrote, that the letter of Dahlsten was very encouraging. Not only had the promised to send the "Bible Reading for the Home Circle," but there were tracts and booklets called "Steps to Christ" in the packet. The most encouraging part of the letter was "that a missionary was coming to Imphal to teach us in the new doctrine." There was great joy among the group.⁵²

As a result of this correspondence, the missionaries made their first visit to Imphal in the 2nd week of October 1951. Pastor F. E. Spiess, President of the Northeast India union Mission; T. M. Ashlock, the missionary appointed for Manipur field, N. O. Dahlsten, President of Assam Mission and others constitute the visitors. They were met by Mr. Hori, one of the leaders of the Reform Christian from Ukhrul. They spent with him two days studying the Bible and answering questions. The missionaries made it clear to Mr. Hori from the beginning that there are many other points of doctrine apart from the Sabbath on which the Seventh-day Adventist church differ with other denominations. To these

⁵²Ibid., p. 9.

doctrines, Mr. Hori replied: "We know this already, and are ready to accept it. We want to know what is in the Bible and when you show us from the Bible we will accept and follow it."⁵³

Previous to this meeting the leaders have been supplied with "Signs of the Times" and other reading materials, so Mr Hori and the other leaders were not ignorant of the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine.

On November 26, 1951, N. O. Dahlsten, T. M. Ashlock came to Ukhrul and were met by the delegates of the Reform Church. As they arrived late that evening, the meeting was held the following day.

Of this trip to Ukhrul, N. O. Dahlsten wrote:

"The roads in the mountain are in a very poor state of repair and our jeep was bogged down in mud a number of times, delaying us for hours. Finally, when we were still eight miles from the village, and the sun was sinking in the west, our faithful jeep again sank down to the axles in mud and water and defied our effort to extricate it. We therefore decided to leave where it was, and find someone to carry our baggage and walk to the village. When we neared the village we were met by people with lanterns coming out to welcome us. . ."

The next morning at about six o'clock visitors began to gather in front of our room. We therefore went outside and before long, groups from different villages came filling past to show us their respect and give us their presents. We received several dozens of eggs, several chickens, cabbages, and at least eighty pounds of potatoes. . . After breakfast, we went to the church for the programme of welcome. After numerous speeches were made

⁵³Dahlsten, *Eastern Tidings*, July 1, 1952, p. 5.

we were each presented with a Naga blanket, which is a work of art and is only presented to those who are accepted as friends.⁵⁴

The missionaries taught them the Bible doctrines, and answered their various questions and acquainted them of the teachings and organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Ninghei wrote, that after the meeting the delegates were satisfied with their (Missionaries) explanation of the Bible. All the delegates then assembled at the yard of Mr. Ninghei and in unison agreed to observe the seventh-day as the Sabbath instead of Sunday as God's holy day. The first Sabbath of December 1951, marks the birth of Sabbath keepers in this region.⁵⁵

Dahlsten wrote that, "all these dear people ask is that we teach them what is in the Bible and how to run a Seventh-day Adventist school so that they can give their children the education they should have; they do not ask any financial assistance or special favour."⁵⁶

The reform church thus embraced the Seventh-day Adventist teaching. However, baptism of these people did not take place immediately as the missionaries felt that more Bible studies is necessary to strengthen them in the faith.

In February 1952, missionaries, including Barkeley, Israel and T. M. Ashlock held evangelistic meetings in Ukhrol for one week. They had three meetings in a day where

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵N. Luikham, Growth and Development of S D A, p. 7.

⁵⁶N. O. Dahlsten, Eastern Tidings, July 1, 1952, p. 5.

they gave full instructions on Bible doctrines. In June 1952, Ninghei Luikham and his son Benjamin Luikham were baptized in Shillong. They were the first fruit of Adventist work in Manipur. Baptism of other members followed and the church in Ukhrul was ready to be organised in 1953, with Ninghei Luikham as the first Church Elder, A. S. Tungmaso, Treasurer and Pangairao as Secretary.

The faith of the infant church was greatly encouraged and strengthened by the frequent missionary visits and the Lay Institute held in Imphal for two weeks by Pastor J. F. Ashlock, Hunter, W. C. Rick, W. G. Lowry and T. M. Ashlock.

Those early years of the beginning of Adventist church in Manipur were trying years. There were much opposition and difficulties that the church has to go through. Ninghei said: "All these trials made us to be closer to our Saviour."⁵⁷

2. Growth of the Church

The mission sent T. M. Ashlock in 1951 to work in Manipur and Nagaland among the Nagas. However, he had to wait in Shillong with his wife until he got the permission to enter these areas. He finally came to Imphal in 1952. His untiring labour helped the growth of the church in Manipur⁵⁸

T. M. Ashlock had a burden for the future of the mission in Manipur and Nagaland. While attending the first Sabbath keepers association which was held at Phungcham village

⁵⁷N. Luikham, *Growth and Development of SDA in Manipur and Nagaland*, p. 9.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 12.

in January 1952, he offered to take fourteen boys to Assam Training School, to give them Adventist education and train them to be future workers.

Tangkhul Area

The church in Ukhrul was set up in 1953. From then on churches and companies of believers were established in various Tangkhul villages. A few of these villages were Phungcham, Champhung, Phalung, Happy Ground, Huining, Kharasom and from these villages it spread to other Tangkhul villages. Mr. Ninghei Luikham played a very active role as an evangelist in the expansion of the church.

Rongmei Naga

In 1956, T. M. Ashlock and Ninghei Luikham preached the message for the first time among the Rongmei tribe at Langthabal Chingtak; a village five miles away from Imphal. The first converts were three girls, Ashangbi, Bino and Diani. Later seven families accepted the message. Among the converts was a man named G. Kakhakhing, a teacher who after his conversion did much to spread Adventist message among the Rongmei Tribe. He translated and printed tracts at his own expense to spread the message.

Evangelistic meeting was held in Lamsang village in December 1956 by Mr Ninghei Luikham, and helped by two young men, Shomi and Yuimi. A church was raised and it became the second Rongmei village of Adventist presence.

Yuimi Luikham who just finished high school from Assam Training School was sent to the Rongmei tribe by the missionary Pastor Donesky in 1959. He began by conducting evangelistic meetings at Charoi. A church with 35 members was raised in this village after

the meetings. Charoi became the Adventist center for the Rongmei tribe. From there the message spread to the surrounding villages. Another evangelist, Shomi was sent to the Rongmei tribe where he raised two companies at Waimen and Khoupum Village.

Seventh-day Adventist work among the Rongmei Naga had a very encouraging response. In fact, there were more S D A Churches raised and more membership from among this tribe than from any other Naga tribe to the present day.

Kuki Tribe

In those years when the Adventist message was preached in many of the villages in Manipur, people became more curious and wanted to know of the doctrines and beliefs of this new church. N. Luikham said, that calls came from every directions, that we could not attend to all of them.

A Kuki man, Mr. Yamkithang, who was a retired government servant as C. O.; and a friend of N. Luikham, thought that the Adventist teaching is strange and wanted to straighten N. Luikham, whom he thought was misled. But in the course of discussion, he was convinced that Adventists teachings are Biblical and therefore true. He said: "I have been a Christian all my life, but I have never heard of such a doctrine. But now I know according to the teaching of the Bible, the Seventh-day Adventist is the true church. And Sabbath day is the right day for the Christian. From today onward I will also keep the Sabbath."

Yamkhithang embraced the Adventist teachings, and left all bad habits including the eating of unclean meat, alcoholic drinks and smoking. The changes in his life style and attitude, attracted many of his neighbours and particularly his wife, who said: "If that is

Christianity, I will also join that church." The whole family then became Seventh-day Adventists.

Another young man by the name of P. Gangte, who was then a leader of Christian young people in that locality learned of this doctrine from Yamkhithang and joined the church. Mr. Yamkhithang, translated and printed many tracts into Kuki dialect. He was instrumental in the spread of Adventism among the Kukis. He first created interest in Uyungmakhong village. After sometime Yuimi Luikham was called to conduct and evangelistic meeting there in which twelve people were baptized as the first fruit from the village.⁵⁹

Mao Naga

In 1957, Mr. Ninghei Luikham was called to Punanamei village. It is a village of the Mao Naga. The Christians in this village wanted to hear of the new doctrine that N. Luikham received, as before becoming an Adventist, he was a Baptist preacher. His visit to this village aroused their thirst for more knowledge of the Bible.

The call from the Mao Naga in Punanamei makes Pastor Donesky to send C. Pheirim, a young man who just finished high school from Assam Training School. C. Pheirim was planning to take up nursing in Rangoon. But he decided to accept the call while he get his papers ready to go to Rangoon.

He went to this Mao village and stayed in the house of Mr. Saheni, a Catholic Pastor who also became his interpreter. The Adventist message was not readily accepted in this

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 14, 15.

village. It required a lot of patience and hard work for C Pheirim to eventually be able to prepare a group of thirteen people to be baptized by Pastor D. J. Doneskey. These were the first converts among the Mao Nagas.

M. Kaiho, a man from Chowainu village, a neighbouring village, who was an Animist, invited C Pheirim to come to his village and preach. The day that he went happened to be "Namungba." It means don't go to the field. A day of no work. "Namungba" is strictly observed till today, at the announcement of the village chief when someone dies in the village, or when there is a fire in the village or when there is hail during the harvest or any disaster. On this occasion, "Namungba" was observed, because two houses were burnt on the previous day. The announcement was made from several high places in the village, that a young preacher has come with a new message and invited all the villagers to attend and listen to the message. The villagers assembled in an open space, and C. Pheirim preached for two and half an hours. He also taught them some songs.

Seeing the good response, Pheirim organised evangelistic meetings in Chowainu village, and as a result thirteen people were baptized and joined the church. The work moved on from place to place in Mao area. Today there are Seventh-day Adventist members scattered all over, as a little group or as isolated members who holds to the doctrine. Three churches were built and organise today.⁶⁰

Manipur Boarding School

The growing need of the members in Manipur, particularly their children for an Adventist School led to the establishment of the present Manipur Boarding School at Gelmol, near Churachandpur.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 18, 19, 21.

All along members who wanted their children to have Adventist education, sent their children to Assam Training School, in Jaintia Hills.

A tract of land was purchased for Boarding School purpose during the time that Pastor B. Lalkhowliana was the circle leader in Manipur. Then more land was added later when Pastor M. C. Kujur purchased more paddy fields. However, the land remained idle for sometime, for the mission did not have a man to start the work.

In 1967, Y. D. Luikham was sent to Gelmol, to begin the boarding school. The work was difficult at the beginning as there was no helpers and very little fund to clear the jungle and get the work started.

Building work began in the later part of 1967. The Boys Hostel and Girls Hostel was built simultaneously. Staff quarters, then the classroom.

In that year 33 students were enrolled. In 1968, more teachers came in. In 1970, Pastor T. M. Ashlock donated some amount to build the school chapel. The Division helped with Rupees one lakh in 1973 to complete the school building.

Within a short time students strength increased to 260. The school opened up to Class Six. By then the school grew in popularity all over Manipur and Nagaland.⁶¹

G. J. Christo, President of the Southern Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventist on his visit to the school in 1968 wrote: "The Northeast India Union Committee feels that this new English-medium boarding school at Gelmol will make available the finest in Christian

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

education to Adventist children living in Naga and Mizo hills. Courses offered will include the language of the state, Manipuri."⁶²

The above account, studied the spread of the work of the missionaries where they had direct impact and influence in establishing and expanding the mission, particularly in Khasi Jaintia Hills, Mizoram and Manipur. The spread of the work in Garo Hills, Assam and Nagaland was done by the native workers, trained and guided by the foreign missionaries. The native workers later carried the work to Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Thus the Seventh-day Adventist mission established and carries its work today in every part of the Northeast.

⁶²G. J. Christo, Southern Asia Tidings, August 1968, p. 5.