

Kamei, Peter Keingamba (1935–2013)

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Peter Keingamba Kamei was a pioneering evangelist, medical missionary, gospel singer, church planter, and an ordained minister from the state of Manipur in northeast India whose ministry spanned four decades.

Early Life, Education and Marriage

Born April 10, 1935 at Nungba village in the Tamenglong district of the state of Manipur, northeast India, Keingamba was the eldest son among seven children (six sons and one daughter) born to Mathiuchung and Kailabuanliu Kamei. The family belonged to the Rongmei community, one of the major indigenous Naga tribes in Manipur. His parents struggled as farmers. For Keingamba, poverty was a constant reality as he grew up into adulthood.

Attending the village school, Keingamba completed grade 2, the highest academic level his parents could offer him. He did not have the opportunity to go to college or seminary. However, he completed medic training in Pune which would become an indispensable tool in his gospel ministry. Afterward, he joined the VVF (Village Volunteer Force), a counter insurgency unit of the Indian army as a paramedic.

Keingambai married two wives—Lachunei Kamei and Langalu Kamei, both non-Christians before their conversion. He had six children (a son and five daughters) from his first wife and four children (a son and three



Peter Keingamba

From *Adventist Review*, April 24, 1980.

daughters) from his second. Their names in order of birth were Gaichamdinliu, Leishiwon, Peilungonglu, Daya, Cornelius, Dhormo, Rachel, Achingpei, Shanti, and Mala. One daughter died in her early teens.¹

Conversion

Initially, Keingamba's parents were animists as were their fellow tribesmen. They eventually converted to Christianity and became committed members of the Baptist church. Sometime during October 1963, C. Pheirim, a 28-year-old newly married theology graduate of Spicer Memorial College, conducted an evangelistic series in Khoupum Valley, some 40 miles from Keingamba's native Nungba. According to Pheirim, many evangelists had refused to hold evangelistic series in the region because they feared VVF members known for beating and terrorizing people. Pheirim bravely agreed to hold meetings in the area. When Keingamba heard the young evangelist preach doctrines contrary to Baptist beliefs, especially about the seventh-day Sabbath, he became angry. He felt that the Adventist preacher was creating division among the Baptists and his family with his strange doctrines.

Keingamba attended every meeting, not because he had an interest in Adventism, but to catch the evangelist criticizing the Baptist church and thus give him grounds to attack him. However, Pheirim presented only Bible truths and spoke not a word against anyone. On several occasions, Keingamba came drunk to disrupt the meetings and to verbally threaten Pheirim. He made several plans to physically assault him. As a member of the VVF, Keingamba was boastful and arrogant. Whenever Pheirim went to give Bible studies to Keingamba's parents in their home, he would either leave the house or listen in a drunken state.² He was a "drinker, smoker, gambler and a heavy meat eater, indulging in the use of all sorts of unclean meat."³

Having baptized 94 converts at the close of the evangelistic meetings, Pheirim returned home. A few months later in 1964, the two men accidentally met in Imphal, the capital of Manipur. To Pheirim's great surprise, Keingamba told him that his messages at Khoupum Valley had convicted him of the Adventist truth and that he had received baptism from A. S. Tungmaso, another Adventist minister. Soon after his baptism, he had resigned from the well-paid VVF job and become a lay evangelist. The two men spent more than an hour on the street talking as Keingamba related his conversion. He pulled out a black Bible and told Pheirim that just as he had preached with one, he would also do the same.⁴ From an enemy of the church, Keingamba had now become its champion.

Keingamba also made a heart-wrenching decision about his polygamous relationship. During an emotionally-charged session, he told his family that it was a sin to live with two wives. After farewell words and prayers, he sent his younger wife away along with her four children. Dhormo Kamei, a child from his second wife, reported that the separation was painful, especially for his mother, but his father loved her with an unselfish divine love. Since she was still young, Keingamba advised her to remarry. However, she refused. The two wives would often

meet and converse just as two sisters would. Both sets of children have a close bond of love for each other because of the example set by their parents.⁵

Ministry

Although Keingamba had not completed even grade 3 nor undergone any theological training, he became a successful self-made evangelist. A voracious reader of the Bible and Adventist publications, his favorite book on Daniel and Revelation was *God Cares* by C. Mervyn Maxwell. He had an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Pheirim says that he has not known any mission worker in Manipur who knew the Bible better than Keingamba. Memorizing every verse relevant for every subject, he was a true "Bible scholar."⁶ He also had good knowledge of the writings of Ellen G. White. His two sons acknowledge that their father's knowledge of the Bible was greater than theirs even though they both completed masters' degrees in theology. He knew the Bible so well that some people even joked that he was the one who wrote it.⁷

Keingamba employed a multi-faceted approach to evangelism. He often went on preaching tours carrying a guitar, a portable blackboard, a petromax, books, picture rolls, a first-aid kit, a portable typewriter, and several versions of the Bible—his weapons as he called them. After giving medical examinations and treatment in the village public area, he would sing a few songs and then preach the gospel. He charged a minimal fee for his medical services which he used to support himself. As a gifted singer, he recorded with the All India Radio for which he received substantial payment and again used the earnings for his ministry.⁸ Although tribal villages prohibited the preaching of the Adventist message, his medical expertise and fame as a singer won him ready access to the homes of the people. Besides, Keingamba was able to preach fluently in seven languages. P. Gangte, a close friend of Keingamba, called him a "one man army of Jesus."⁹

A born preacher, Keingamba had an amazing ability to keep his audience in rapt attention with his sermons. His evangelistic efforts usually lasted 30-40 days. Preaching without notes, another amazing skill he had developed, he wove captivating stories throughout his talks. In all his meetings, one would usually find the audience laughing at one moment and crying at another. Keingamba also had the ability to persuade his audience to accept biblical truth. Lantungmei, a theology graduate of Spicer Adventist University, in whose house Keingamba stayed for a number of years, still recalls his ringing voice as he summoned people to follow Jesus.¹⁰

Keingamba endured his share of persecution during his ministry. Several attempts were made on his life. While preaching in one village in the Tamenglong district, someone shot at him. The bullet missed and hit the blackboard. In another village, a group of men surrounded and threatened to beat him. At that very moment, another strong man intervened and confronted them. He also survived several other assassination attempts on his life and seven vehicle accidents.¹¹

As his popularity grew in the region, his ministry expanded as well. As a member of Paul's Missionary Band (PMB), a lay ministry group under the guidance of Pastor Yuimi D. Luikham, Keingamba preached in many

villages of Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam. He also worked as a literature evangelist in Nagaland for some years.

¹² By the time of his retirement, it is estimated that his converts numbered nearly 3,000. Pouchalung claims that Keingamba's "efforts have probably brought more people to Christ than those of any other Adventist evangelist in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Manipur and Nagaland."¹³

According to his son Cornelius, his father established 31 churches and inspired many individuals to share the Adventist message.¹⁴ He pioneered among several language groups, including the Meiteis and Kom tribes.¹⁵ Additionally, Keingamba brought revival to many Adventist congregations across the three states.¹⁶ Close to his retirement, he served at Kakching town, a predominantly Hindu area where he raised a church of 40 members. Until recently, it was the only Adventist congregation in the state among the Meiteis.¹⁷ Unfortunately, most of the churches he planted are struggling for survival due to the lack of nurturing and proper leadership.

GC Trip and Ordination

His evangelistic efforts and accomplishments earned him a trip to the 1980 General Conference session at Dallas, Texas, as a lay representative where he shared his testimony. His picture appeared on the cover of the April 24, 1980, *Adventist Review*.¹⁸ In January 1987 the Manipur-Nagaland Section of Seventh-day Adventists also recognized Keingamba's outstanding contributions to the growth of the church in the region by appointing him as a regular evangelist. On the same occasion, Pheirim ordained him to the gospel ministry.¹⁹

Later Life and Death

Keingamba retired from active ministry November 30, 1998, and settled at Chingkhilong, Lamshang, Imphal. Years later, he had a stroke. Pastor Keingamba passed away August 23, 2013, at his home in Lamshang, Imphal, at the age of 78.²⁰ He was buried in the family garden.

Contribution

Several churches owe their beginning to his evangelistic efforts. His two sons carry his torch as ordained ministers. Dr. Cornelius Kamei serves as the district pastor of Beaufort and Hilton Head Island in the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Pastor Dhormo Kamei is the director of Nagaland Region in Dimapur, India. Some of Pastor Keingamba's converts have studied theology at Spicer Adventist University and are now laboring in mission fields. Having indeed passed on the mission baton to the younger generation of Adventist youth in Manipur, his legacy lives on.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Pouchalung Pamei, son-in-law of Keingamba, WhatsApp Message, July 10, 2020; Louis Riemei, grandson of Keingamba, WhatsApp Message, July 10, 2020.
2. C. Pheirim, former president of Northeast India Union, phone interview by the author, Pune, Maharashtra, India, July 7, 2020.
3. "PMB's Continued Effort," *Southern Asia Tidings*, October 1979, 5.
4. C. Pheirim, phone interview.
5. Dhormo Kamei, director of the Nagaland Region of Seventh-day Adventists, phone interview by the author, July 6, 2020.
6. C. Pheirim, phone interview.
7. Dhormo Kamei, phone interview.
8. Pouchalung Pamei and Champoumei Dangmei, eds., *The Golden Jubilee Celebration 1963-2013* (Imphal, India: Michael's Computer Works, 2015), 25.
9. Pouchalung Pamei, "Profile of Pastor Peter Keingamba Kamei," *Sangai Express*, August 2013.
10. Lantungmei Malangmei, a theology student at Spicer Adventist University, interview by the author, July 6, 2020.
11. C. Pheirim, phone interview.
12. "PMB's Continued Effort," *Southern Asia Tidings*, October 1979, 5.
13. Pamei and Dangmei, eds., *The Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 25.

14. Cornelius Kamei, "The History of the Emergence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the State of Manipur, India," (D.Min. dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 2010), 139. For a list of the villages where Keingamba established churches or groups of Adventists, see Pamei and Dangmei, eds., *The Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 26.
15. K. A. Shimray, "School of Evangelism: ATS Seminary Students," *Southern Asia Tidings*, July 1981, 12.
16. Dhormo Kamei, phone interview.
17. Pamei and Dangmei, eds., *The Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 26.
18. *Southern Asia Tidings*, June 1980, 13; *Adventist Review*, April 24, 1980.
19. Pamei and Dangmei, eds., *The Golden Jubilee Celebration*, 25.
20. Pamei, *Sangai Express*, August 2013.

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