



**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

SEVENTH SESSION

PASIGHAT : 1986

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NORTH EAST INDIA
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SEVENTH SESSION
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PREFACE

It gives us great joy to find that the Association has been growing in strength over the years as the premier research organisation in North East India. Our strategies of grass-root research, inter-disciplinary approach, and group orientation for an objective understanding of the nature of socio-economic developments and social formations at different points of time have started to yield the cherished results. The membership of the organisation has been steadily increasing. Our more than three hundred members today are the researchers from the Surveys and research departments and the teachers in the Universities, Colleges and Schools spread over all the seven States in the North-East, besides a few from outside the region. Our members are not from History but also almost all the Social Sciences and Humanities streams, and this is because of our faith in the study of history as a science for socio-economic development. Our annual sessions are major academic gatherings in the region, attended on an average by hundred and fifty delegates from all over the region. A large number of research papers are presented and discussed in the annual session each one of which is a substantial addition to the existing literature. Our proceedings volumes are acclaimed as major references on North East India. We get requests for copies of current as well as back volumes from all over the country and even abroad.

We have also been able to create some enthusiasm about research in the history of the region. The researches in the history of North East India are going on in all the Universities in the region. A large number of M. Phil. and Ph. D. candidates are working in regional history. There are on-going individual research projects by teachers and professional researchers. The seminars are occasionally organised in various institutions. A fair number of research publications have come out in recent years and many more must be in the pipe lines. The under-graduate and post-graduate level courses in the history of North East India are offered in the Universities in the region. Some of the State departments are planning to introduce the study of the history of the concerned State in the schools, and some of our members are cooperating with the SCERTs in preparing the text books. The emerging important functions of this Association are to coordinate the on-going researches, to design a perspective for research, to develop appropriate tools and methodologies, and

to create literature in the history of the region so that it may be possible to prepare a Comprehensive History of North East India in the next few years.

The present volume is the Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Session of the North East India History Association held at the Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat on November 11-13, 1986. Professor J. B. Ganguly, Director, Calcutta University Post-graduate Centre, Agartala presided over the Session which was inaugurated by Shri Khapriso Krong, Minister of Education, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Shri B. K. Kakoty, Principal, and Dr. S. Dutta, Head, Department of History, Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat did us great honour as Chairman of the Reception Committee and Local Secretary of the Session respectively. Besides its high academic contents, the delegates shall cherish the fond memory of the session for warmth of the reception extended by the organisers and the colourful entertainment programme. Our thanks are due to the authorities of the Jawaharlal Nehru Colleges Pasighat and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

I am personally thankful to my colleagues Dr J. P. Singh, Dr. O. P. Kejariwal, Dr. Milton S. Sangma, Dr. D. R. Syiemlieh and Mr. Abhijit Choudhury for the help in editing and publishing this volume. We are also thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research and the North Eastern Council for financial assistance.

Shillong

The 25 September 1987.

(J. B. Bhattacharjee)

General Secretary,

North East India History Association.

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Attempts to Christianize the People of Arunachal by the American Baptist Missionaries (1836-1950)

M. S. Sangma

For ages, the tribes of the North-East borders of Assam, the northern borders of Burma and the western borders of China have lived their lives of isolation. Sadiya was considered to be a doorway of opportunity for the reaching of many of these tribes. Assam was entered and Sadiya was opened as a Mission Station in order to reach the Shans or the Kamtis on the north-east frontiers, and through them to enter China and Tibet. That was in 1836, but after three years of work, the Mission Station was destroyed by the Khamti war. These early Missionaries started a work for the Singphos and the Kamtis but no trace of their work was left behind. Sadiya as a Mission Station was closed for 66 years, and when it was reopened in 1905, the original object was lost sight of and was reopened for the purpose of evangelizing the Miris, Abors, Mishmis, Daplas and other tribes.¹

In the Third Triennial Conference of the Assam Baptist Missionaries held at Tura in 1893, they requested that two men be sent to North Lakhimpur - one for the Bengalees and one for the Miris. In response to this request, John Firth and his wife were sent and reached North Lakhimpur in the winter of 1893. John Firth after reaching the field and seeing the great number of Miris in the vicinity and their willingness to listen to Gospel Preaching, continued to urge that a man be sent at once. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Paul were sent from America and they arrived at North Lakhimpur in January, 1895.

Considerable touring was done among the Miris in the winter of 1895, and finding them very much numerous in Assam, and that they spoke the Assamese language, and that many could read it, they decided to use that language in working among them. But the only means of access to their villages was by boat. Accordingly, the end of rains found Paul with a boat fitted up for touring, and a party consisting of the Missionary, his wife and a local Preacher. Preaching and teaching the Gospel in the Miri villages on the Ronga and Subansiri rivers. In November, 1895, a site was chosen for a Compound at Pathalipam, 18 miles north-east of North Lakhimpur on the Subansiri river.²

In October, 1896, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Paul moved to Pathalipam. In the Missionary Conference held at Sibsagar in 1895,

Joseph Paul asked for a Missionary for the Daplas. This has been supplied but not from America, but from the Garo Hills. Tosin, a youngman came to work among the Daplas supported by the Garo Baptists and did considerable work having started a small school in one village. But the work was slow and tedious and its durability was uncertain.³

According to the Missionary Report for 1900, a Dapla youngman was baptised and Tosin continued to work among the Daplas. In 1899, Miss Firth came to North Lakhimpur with a view to going up into the mountains for work for the Daplas. But the way not opening for her, she worked at the Station, especially among the Daplas. The conversion of a young Dapla man mentioned above was mainly due to her work.⁴

In 1899, Sadiya and its neighbourhood on the north bank was re-opened to Mission work. Mesters Lorrain and Savidge of the Arthington Mission settled at Sadiya and got prepared to evangelise the Abors, but left a short while later.⁵

In January, 1904, Joseph Paul accompanied by a local Preacher, made a tour in the north Lakhimpur District amongst the Miris on the Subansiri river, during which many have heard the Gospel. At one place, almost one thousand Miris gathered to hear the Gospel by means of Magic Lantern. They received them gladly, thanked them for their medical help in the form of sack of rice and begged them to come again. But they could not be converted.⁶

Rev. and Mrs. L. W. B. Jackman came, as new Missionaries and arrived at Sadiya on December 7, 1905. On arrival, Jackman found that most of the evangelistic works so far has been done among the Assamese and immigrant peoples settled in and around Sadiya Station only. Up to 1906, except talking to individuals at their bungalow, the Missionaries had not carried out evangelistic work among the Miris and Abors. The Miri country was then opened to the Missionaries up to the foot hills of Himalayas. The Missionaries then presented the question of entering the Abot villages before the Lieutenant Governor, when he visited Sadiya town in that year. The representation was favourably received and promised to present the matter to the Indian Government before permission was given. In the meantime, invitations were received from the headmen of several Abor villages and also from one Sulikatta Mishmi village, to visit with medicines. Miris started asking for Schools but the teachers were not available. Therefore, the establishment of the Training School for the Miris and the

Abors were on the way.

Jackman first tried to acquire the language throughout the year. The proof sheets of Lorrain's two books, "An Abor-Miri-English Dictionary" and "Story of the True God" were taken care of. Then Jackman got ready for the press his "Abor-Miri Primer."⁷ Thus the work of the Sadiya Mission Station during 1907-09, consisted of two quite separate branches - one for and among the Assamese and the immigrant peoples in and about the Sadiya Station and the for the Miris and Abor tribes out in the district. In course of their evangelistic works the Missionaries found that Opium was the stumbling block to their work.

Touring among the Miris : Having failed to penetrate into the Miris by working in the plains, the Missionaries planned to tour their areas. This was begun in the winter of 1907-08. During this time, over 40 villages had been visited. The territory covered extended about 100 miles along the Brahmaputra. Besides this, the villages on the Dibong, Dihang, Sissiri, Lalli and Paba rivers have been visited. The Missionaries found that the Miris were good listeners and assenting to nearly everything one says. But verbal consent was one thing and receiving the religion and following it was quite another. The Miris gave a below to the latter. But in the last trip of the Missionary, there were many who were convinced that many aspects of Hinduism were wrong. One Miri young-man said, "If our forefathers will accept this new religion, we young-man are ready to do so".

Touring among the Abors : In the winter of 1907-08, two trips were made up among the Abors. One without the permission of the Government, and the other with permission. In the winter of 1909, Jackman toured again - one alone and the other as the guest of the political officer, Mr. Williamson and Colonel D. M. Lumsden. Besides these, they also have visited most of the Abor villages and plains, inside of the outer line. During these trips, thousands of Miris and Abors have been treated with medicines.

During 1907-09, the proof reading of Rev. J. H. Lorrane's two books- Story of the True God, and the Abor-Miri-English Dictionary have been completed. "The Abor-Miri-Primer" and "A Brief Statement of the Gospel" in Abor-Miri Language have also been printed. The New Testament portion of the story "Story of the True God" was also prepared in manuscript in Bengali alphabet.⁸

In response to an invitation by the Government officers, one of the Missionaries made a tour of 250 miles in Pony trap, elephant,

boat and on foot in the Miri, Abor and Mishmi regions, for the purpose of discovering the prospect for Mission work among the Daplas and Hill Miris. The North Lakhimpur and Biswanath Mission fields were traversed from end to end.

Both the Daplas and Hill Miris lived in back of the first low range of mountains and their outlets to the plains were down the beds of a number of rivers which cut through the range. The Missionary found that the Mishmi country lying off towards the Chinese border, offered one of the grandest opportunities for the Assam Mission. It was the intention of Mr. Williamson, the Political Officer to build a road through the Mishmi areas and thus to link Assam with Tibet and western China, and so open a channel through which it was believed a tremendous flow of trade would follow, and by which Chinese coolies could be recruited for tea-gardens. At that time, the Government was sparing no effort to complete this road as fast as possible. Government officers, thousands of coolies, mules and carts were all hard at work. From Sadiya to Rima which was inside Tibet was about 160 miles. About 50 miles from Sadiya at the entrance of the gorge leading into the Mishmi hills was a place called Temi. Here a camp has been formed, a field Hospital established, and a Post Office opened. In these 50 miles of plains, there was but a sparse population. The advance party building the road have now passed Temi and gone about 35 to 40 miles beyond. It was about this place, in 1854, that two French Missionaries who had penetrated this far were killed. Since that day, no Missionaries had entered the Mishmi hills.

The Mishmis were spirit worshippers and so far Buddhism and Hinduism have made no adherents among them. An assistant Political Officer has been appointed for the Mishmi hills and a Station was to be opened at Walung at an altitude of about 3200 ft.

The Kamtis near Sadiya lived mainly on the Tenga Pani river about 2 to 3 days' journey from Sadiya. They are a branch of the Shans from northern Burma and numbered about 5000 people and were all Buddhists. They had a school in each village and priest who had been to Burma.⁹ They have been exceedingly appreciative of the medical work of the Missionaries. In one trip, Dr. Karby and his wife treated about 700 patients in 13 days. The people gave them liberally rice, eggs, etc. in return. When the Missionaries left their king's village, he ordered every house to give the Missionaries one seer of clean rice. Among these villages, the rice crop is three times. They also catch elephants, hold slaves and paid no taxes and were all well-off. Buddhism has done a lot for these

people and has given considerable culture. They preached about Christ, with the aid of Stereoptism in almost all the villages and everywhere they had friendly reception.

In another trip, they took Dr. Barbour to a Kamti village where no Missionary had ever before entered. They preached in their temple courtyard, hanging their lantern sheet to the walls of the Temple. Two weeks journey from Sadiya over the mountains took them to the Bor Kamti country known as - Kamptilong. This place has been described as an ideal spot for a Mission Station. The Missionaries met many of them as they came to Sadiya to trade and many others in Kamti villages where they heard the Gospel. Their headmen have frequently invited the Missionaries into their country offering to provide all the coolies needed.

As far as the Political reasons go, it was then safe to enter their country as the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Bentinck was quite friendly to their entering the country. Many of the Kamtis who came to Sadiya to trade also crossed over to northern Burma and to Myitkyima to trade. The Kamtis raised opium in their villages, and many of them used it. One headman told Dr. Kyrby, that it took Re. 1/- everyday to provide opium for his family. They have a written language of their own differing very little from the Shan. The Priest read Burmese and taught it in their schools.

Captain B. E. A. Prichard who crossed in 1712 from Myitkyima to Sadiya, going through the Bor Kamti country, was four months on the journey. He crossed over a range of 12000 ft. high in the snows. His coolies deserted him and he lost most of his kits and suffered untold hardships. He could thus be called the greatest explorer on the north-eastern frontiers.

The Singphos corresponding to the Kachens of Burma, lived on the border of Burma and are all Buddhists. Near Sadiya, the Singphos are mainly on the Noa Dihing river stretching off into the Hukong Valley, they came into contact with the Kamtis. Away from the Kamtis, the Singphos are all spirit worshippers. In Government circles they were considering whether the Hukong Valley be attached to the Province of Burma or Assam, and Railroad was planned to go through the Hukong Valley and so link up Burma and Assam. One of the Gospels has been translated into Singpho. From Sadiya to Myitkyima in northern Burma is 285 miles by road through the Hukong Valley.

During the years 1911-1912, 17 have been baptised and the membership in 1913 was 55. The Night School has not continued

through the whole of two years. For eight months there were bright Kamti boys in attendance but went home to help in cutting of the rice and did not return because of the Bible verses learned.

In 1915 these hills were close to the Missionaries again due to the trouble between the Abors and the British resulting from the murder of the British Political Officer, Mr. Williamson. Some years ago, doors were opened to the Missionaries and some persons have been baptised and others were awaiting baptism.

Work among the Abors : During the year 1913 the Missionaries were able to do much medical work among the Abors during the epidemic of ulcers from which they were suffering. Following this up, a school was established in 1914 in one village on the plains and continued encouragingly throughout the year.

The largest hill village near the plains begged the Missionaries to come to them and offered to build a house for the Missionary and his family to live among them. The same village has been asking for a school. But the advance into the hills had to be postponed as the Government officers could not go among these villages outside of British territory without military escorts. But as far as these people were concerned their areas were opened for the Missionaries for months. The two Garo evangelists sent by the Churches of the Garo Hills to work on the north-east frontiers, have been with the Missionaries for months. After sometime, both of them started working among the Abors, learnt the language and engaged in schools and medical works.

Work among the Miris : During the summer, the centre for the Miri work was established on the Subansiri river, about 4 miles above Badati. At Dogorie, the Mission Station for the Miris had two evangelists, a motor boat Assistant in charge of the Mishings and a boy. The Mission had a plan to work for the Miris from that centre. The Motor Cruiser "Mishing has been continued to be of the greatest assistance in the work above the rivers".

In 1916, the work among the Abors seemed very promising. The two schools were apparently in good condition and permission has been given for opening work on a new village.¹² In 1916, there were two Abor boys in the Sadiya Mission Station School.¹³

In 1926, the Missionaries went up the Parasramkund in the middle of January joining the unusual throng of Pilgrims to that sacred shrine. Thousands came because of the eclipse, this being especially propitious. Hundreds who had come the 47 miles up above Sadiya were unable to cross over Mishmighats and proceed the remaining 5 miles to the Pools. Here the Missionaries worked not

only with the local people but among the pilgrims, going from group to group encamped there on boulders waiting for a possible chance to cross or resting on their way back. 700 Gospels in Hindi, Nepali and Assamese were sold and over 1000 tracts distributed.

In February, 1926, the Station School at Sadiya was closed on account of measles in the military lines. Later, this epidemic spread to the villages and one of the four boys studying at Sadiya succumbed to Pneumonia.

The School in Maka Abor village was reopened. The villagers came to the Missionaries and asked for two pandits for their two villages. They were ready to build the necessary houses. The Political Officer was desirous of sending Dugyon, the first Abor christian convert to Dambuk, a large centre for the Padam Abor. Dugyon has studied in Jorhat and has helped the Missionary in translation work. Through his help, 64 pages Abor song book has been written and sent to the press. The Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John and Acts, were in manuscript.

There were four Abor boys who were under training in Jorhat and Shillong, besides four boys in Sadiya Boarding School.¹⁴

In the North Lakhimpur Mission Station school there were few Dapla orphans and they were working on the Mission *Compound* for their expenses.¹⁵ There were four Primary Schools in the Abor villages in 1935.¹⁶

The Station School at Sadiya had a five group of Abor boys. These boys were maintained by the Government and the Mission Stipends.¹⁷

In December 1936, John Selander, the Missionary made a trip into Abor villages and visited the villages from where the Abor High School boys came. Night after night these Abor High School boys helped Selander in telling the story of Jesus to their own people. This was very encouraging to the Missionary and a remarkable change in the attitude of the Abor villages as they were most friendly. The Sadiya Mission Station School had about 50 Abor boys in the Baaording on Easterday, John Selander had baptised three Abor boys.¹⁸ The Missionaries have been anxiously trying to get Abor teachers for the Sadiya Station School.¹⁹

It was reported in 1940 that the Missionaries spent the Christmas week in the Dambuk group of villages in Abor lands. The School boys on vacation were a great help to the Missionaries in telling the Christmas stories to the Abors, who still have never heard of them. The Missionaries saw the illnesses, sores, and sickness of children and old folks, their poverty and needs, physical

and mental and spiritual. So they felt the need to do something to relieve them.²⁰

According to Missionary reports for 1941, the Missionaries have translated into Padam Abor language and printed the Gospels of Mathew, Luke and John and Acts and Corinthians of the New Testament.²¹

In 1944, Misses M. I. Laughlin and L. P. Bonney looked after the Abor Boys' School at Sadiya.²²

The Abor work in 1946 has been limited to the Station School and the Abors were coming. In 1945, 120 of them came from 23 different villages. It was the largest enrolment in the history of the Abor School at Sadiya. The plain Miris formerly unreachable have come too. One of the Abor boys who was supported by the Mission at Jorhat School, was baptised.

The Government was giving the Abors attention. Outposts have been established, 9 days walk up the Tsanpo river and an air strip where planes could land has been built.²³

According to report for 1947, the Abor School at Sadiya enrolled 129 Abor boys. Regular chapel services and singing were conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Vining.

By this time, the tribes on the north-western frontiers were at least receiving serious attention and considerations by the Central Government. Road Building, Medical, Educational and Agricultural Departments and Military Defence. These were the songs of the dawn of a new day for these tribes of Arunachal Pradesh²⁴.

According to Missionary Report of 1949, the Missionaries have used the Flannelgraph lessons and found the Abors eager to watch and listen. A Sunday Evening service in Sadiya for Abors in the Abor language has been started with success.

In the Abor villages along the edge of the mountains inside the Excluded area, the Missionaries showed Lantern slides and distributed medicines. The people were friendly and interested and gave the Missionaries warm invitations to return. In 1948, 147 Abor boys from 42 villages attended the Sadiya Boarding School.²⁵

In 1949, the Missionaries were still not permitted to set foot across the Inner Line Boundary of the Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills but even then, Progress of Preaching has not been negligible. The Council of chieftains has reserved a tract of lands for use as a Permanent Mission Station. Visits have been made to nearby villages and lengthy discussions have been held, songs sung and personal relationship has been strengthened.

Recent enquiries from the Miris were very encouraging to the Missionaries with many requests for Bibles. The Miri villages were largely outside the Inner Line restrictions and the Missionary will enter there. 3 Padams, 2 Galongs and 2 Miris accompanied the Missionary to the Ao Naga Association conference that year.

The Abor wife of a Sema Naga was baptised, and thus she was the first Abor woman ever baptised. Soon after, another Abor woman was baptised. There has been good response to visitations to local Abor houses. Medicines have been carried into these houses.

The first issue of the Abor Newspaper, "Sangar" (Crack of Dawn) came off the mimeograph Press just before Christmas. It was discovered after the first issue was circulated that the name was a very good translation of the first Assamese Paper ever printed in Assam, "Arunodoi".

The enrolment in the Abor Sadiya School was 140 with an average of 85, as many boys needed to make trips to their villages for rice. There were 30 plain boys, of whom 18 were in the Hostel ; 29 boys were Galong Abor.²⁶

From the above, it is clear that the American Baptist Missionary efforts to Christianize the People of Arunachal Pradesh were not as successful as in other hills of North East India. No full fledged church could be implanted in the tribal village within Arunachal. At the most, only some Abors, Mishmis and Daplas have been converted into Christianity during the Period 1836-1950 or the Missionary Period.

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