

Albizuri Among the Lyngáms

(A Brief History of the Catholic Mission among
the Lyngams of Northeast India)

Sebastian Karotemprel, S.D.B.

VENDRAME MISSIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

SHILLONG

1985

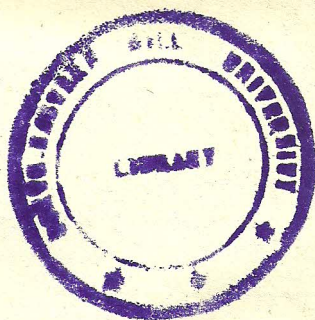
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*Dedicated
 to the memory of
 Fr. Ignatius Rubio and all our Spanish Confreres who
 have worked in Northeast India and contributed
 substantially to the development of the people
 of this region and the growth of the Church*

Published by
 Vendrame Missiological Institute
 Shillong

First Edition, 1985, Shillong, Calcutta
 © Vendrame Missiological Institute Shillong, 1985

Printed by
 Dhawan Printing Works,
 A-26, Mayapuri, Phase I,
 New Delhi, 110064

Preface

Fr. Manolo Albizuri will occupy a high place in the roster of missionaries who dedicated their lives to the cause of Christ in Northeast India. The Church in Northeast India has been privileged to have been served by a large number of men of remarkable apostolic spirit; men whose courage, generosity and spirit of self-sacrifice were raised above ordinary levels of achievement by the exacting physical and spiritual conditions under which they laboured.

A mountainous terrain, harsh weather condition, paucity of roads, dense forests, long journeys on foot, a primitive people; each made severe demands on the physical resources, the moral strength and the spiritual resilience of the men who brought the light of the Gospel into this inhospitable region. The rich harvest of souls, the proliferation of institutions of education and social service, the multiplication of dioceses, in a word, a flourishing christianity, is a valuable tribute to apostolic labourers like Fr. Albizuri, SDB. For him, no sacrifice was too great, no privation too exacting, no danger too daunting to prevent him from preaching the Gospel to a distant village situated almost in some impenetrable forest or perched on some inaccessible mountain ledge.

His death, in a jeep accident, was symbolic of his life. He always lived dangerously, and a peaceful death-bed would have been out of character with his life as he chose to lead.

A laughing cavalier of Christ, he always retained, despite the mishaps and trials of his life, an irrepressible good humour for the entertainment of his fellow Salesians.

It was a happy thought of Fr. Sebastian Karotemprel, SDB, to make his life and work accessible to the reading public specially to Catholics whose appreciation of missionary vocation may

have suffered an eclipse under the impact of the social orientations abroad in the post-Vatican Church.

The historical, geographical and anthropological information contained in the book enhances its value.

C. FONSECA, S.J.,
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Introduction

It is always somewhat presumptuous to venture into writing about a remote tribe, remote in culture, language and customs. The task is made even more difficult as there are no written records, when its language has no script.

The mission centre too of Sonapahor is a reflection of the people in the Lyngám area. Fr. Albizuri was not a man for records, beyond baptism and marriage registers. When I inquired about mission chronicles and records and stressed their importance for future historians, his reply was quick: "I do not keep a record of history. I have no time for it. I only make history" Indeed, he was a maker of history rather than a chronicler of history!

On the other hand Fr. Albizuri had a very sharp memory and an extraordinary capacity for narrating past events, though not without exaggerations. In fact, some of the information I have been able to gather about the Lyngáms comes from him, while for the rest I am indebted to Catechists, the Lyngám people themselves and the priests who have been connected with the mission of Sonapahar. I have also made use of written records about them by anthropologists and historians.

This short work was planned during my brief stay at Sonapahar during the Holy Week of 1982, from April 7 to 12. There I was able to interview the Sisters of the Society of Christ Jesus, several Catechists, Presbyterian Church leaders, etc. Subsequently, I was able to discuss matters with priests connected with the Lyngám people and with the growth of the Catholic Church in that area. I have also done some research in the Vendrame missiological Institute library at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong.

I must say a word about the structure of this study. It is divided into three distinct chapters.

The first chapter deals with anthropological and sociological information about the Lyngáms. The second chapter outlines the history of the Catholic Church, its beginnings and growth in the Lyngám area. The third chapter describes Albizuri as a missionary and his approach to evangelization.

The third chapter was not originally planned as a part of this book. It was an after thought following the tragic and untimely death of Fr. Albizuri on September 30, 1982.

I hope that those with anthropological and sociological interests will find in chapter one some new information hitherto not found in earlier works about the Lyngáms. Those interested in Church and mission history can turn to chapter two while those who knew Fr. Albizuri will find the third chapter useful. Finally, all those engaged in evangelization work will, I hope, find inspiration from these pages to work with greater enthusiasm for the good of our people.

I am grateful to those who have furnished me with useful information and to others who have read through the manuscripts critically and offered their suggestions. Among those I must mention Fr. Paul Bernick, Fr. Ignatius Rubio (R.I.P.), Fr. George Vanni, Fr. Joseph Kizhekkechennadu, Fr. Cyriac Kochupurackal, Fr. Joseph (V) Puthenpurackal, Fr. George Kottuppallil, Bishop Thomas Meenamparampil, Fr. Felix Bollini, Rev. S. Wollington, Paster Fidelis Dkhar, Fr. Thomas Macheril, Dr. Dutta Ray, Dr. M. Wassim, Dr. Gruessner from the University of Tuebingen, J.P.F. Furst and Fr. Devasia Vazhayil. I owe a special word of thanks to Fr. C. Fonseca for patiently going through the manuscripts and writing a preface. It is regretted that Fr. Fonseca passed away towards the end of 1983. Throughout the book, I have used a simplified form of spelling for Lyngám except in citations.

Sacred Heart Theological College,
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Sebastian Karotemprel,
SDB

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