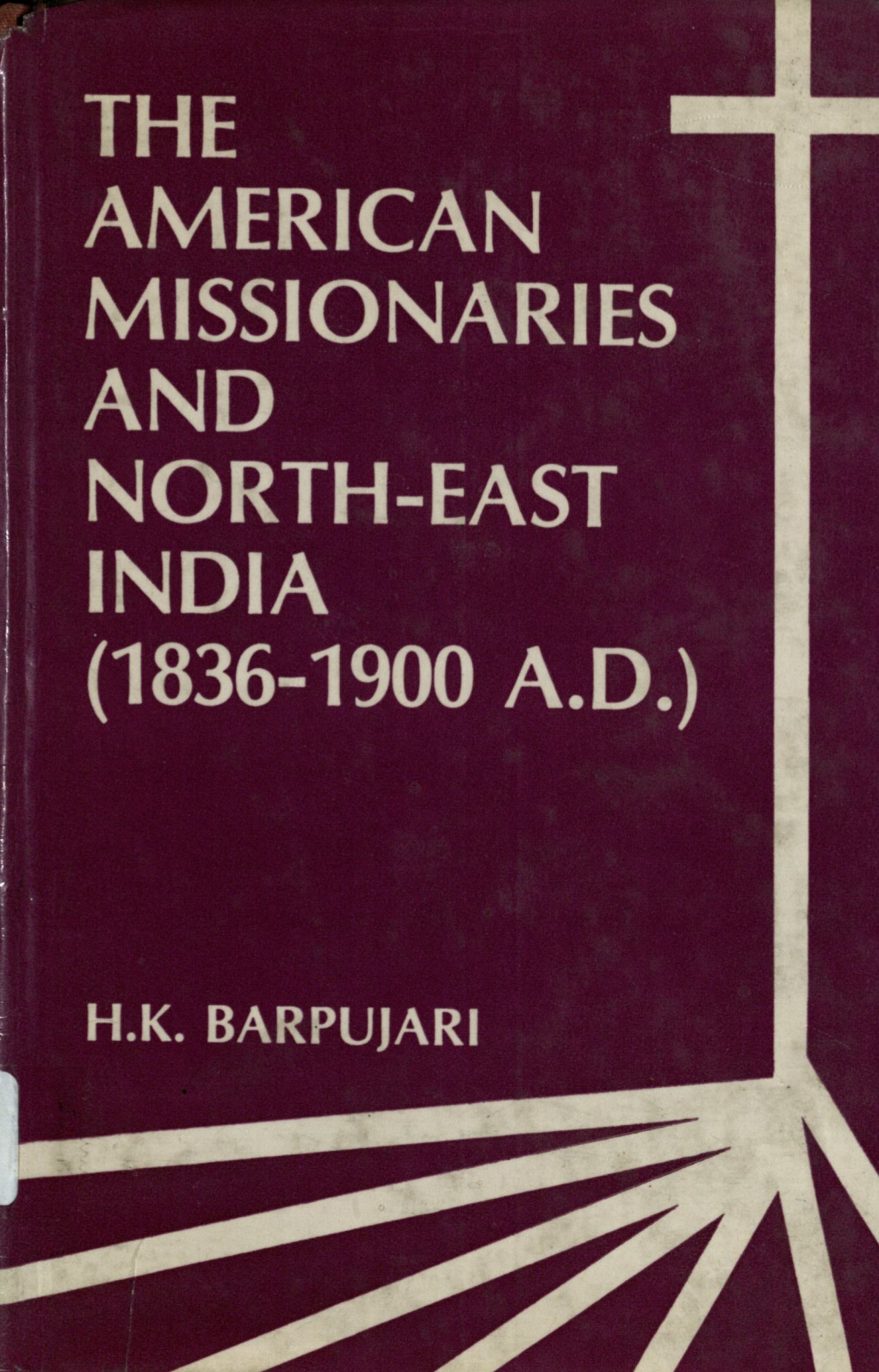


**THE
AMERICAN
MISSIONARIES
AND
NORTH-EAST
INDIA
(1836-1900 A.D.)**

H.K. BARPUJARI

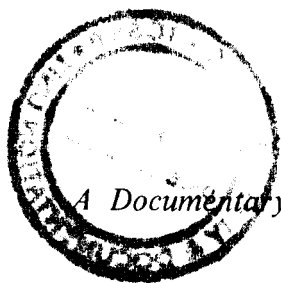


The American Baptist Missionaries were the earliest and largest group of foreign missionaries who played a significant role in the socio-economic-cultural life of North-Eastern India. This *Documentary Study* seeks to trace the early history of their evangelisation—successes and failures, problems and difficulties, contributions in diverse fields: linguistic, educational, cultural, moral and incidently political and other developments which had affected their operations. It also deals with the lives and conditions of cross-sections of the people with whom the missionaries worked and moved. Archival materials of the *Mission Rooms* apart, it includes for a better perspective and a clearer understanding, official documents of the Government of India, pieces of Baptist Missionary Magazine, excerpts of private papers and contemporary and semi-contemporary works on the subject. The introduction provides a panoramic view of the entire ground covered besides the editor's observations and conclusions on the impact of Christianity both in the hills and plains.

Professor H.K. Barpujari who has edited this volume headed the department of History, University of Gauhati. In connection with his academic work and research studies he had been to the U.S.A., U.K. and U.S.S.R. He has been closely associated with Indian History Congress, Indian Historical Records Commission, Indian Council of Historical Research, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta and several other learned associations in India and abroad. An outstanding scholar in Modern Indian History, he is credited so far with six major works. Assam: *In the Days of the Company* (1826-58); *Political History of Assam* (ed) (1826-1919); *Problem of the Hill Tribes: North-East Frontier Vol I* (1822-42), *Vol II* (1842-72); *Vol. III* (1873-1962); *Inner Line to McMahon Line*; *Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. I* ed. (In the press)

THE AMERICAN MISSIONARIES AND NORTH-EAST INDIA

(1836-1900 A.D.)



A Documentary Study

H. K. BARPUJARI, M.A., Ph.D. (Lond)

*Formerly Senior Professor and Head, Department
of History, University of Guwahati*



SPECTRUM

SPECTRUM PUBLICATIONS

GUWAHATI : DELHI

Published by :

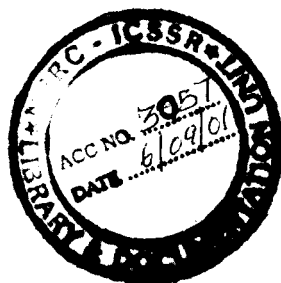
Shri Krishan Kumar on behalf of
Spectrum Publications

- * Post Box No 45, Pan Bazar
Guwahati-781 001 India
- * 298B Tagore Park, Model Town
Delhi-110 009, India



003057

First Published 1986



Sole Distributors :

United Publishers

- * Pan Bazar Main Road
Guwahati-781 001
- * 38 UA Bunglow Road
Jawahar Nagar, Delhi-110 007

266.0237305416

U. S. A. Distributors :

East India Book Company

635 Second Avenue, Suite 2-R

New York, NY 10016, USA

Printed in India by Shri N. Sen

GOOD ASSOCIATES, 16/3E, Dixon Lane, Calcutta-700 014

CONTENTS

Preface	iii
Introduction	xi
Photographs of Revs. Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson				lix-l

PART ONE : THE AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSION

<i>Section I</i>	: Mission to the Shans	..	1
<i>Section II</i>	: Early Operations	..	6
<i>Section III</i>	: Internal Affairs	..	43
<i>Section IV</i>	: Problems and Difficulties	..	54
<i>Section V</i>	: The Baptists and the Mutiny (1857-8)		63
<i>Section VI</i>	: Urban Development	..	73
<i>Section VII</i>	: The Baptists and the English	..	92
<i>Section VIII</i>	: Christian Education	..	101
<i>Section IX</i>	: Problem of Language	..	122
<i>Section X</i>	: Assamese-Christian Literature	..	151

PART TWO : THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

<i>Section XI</i>	: Assam and the Assamese	..	169	
<i>Section XII</i>	: Bronson and the Nagas	..	231	
	(i) Moral and Material Improvement		253	
	(ii) The AOs and the Angamis		266	
<i>Section XIII</i>	: The People of the Garrow Hills		268	
<i>Section XIV</i>	: The Mikirs, Miris, Singpho and			
	Abor Tribes		292	
<i>Section XV</i>	: The Hill Tribes of Assam	..	305	
Sketch map, Sibsagar	74
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES		313
ERRATA	323

INTRODUCTION

The cross followed the British flag. The East India Company sent out from the very beginning chaplains to India to look after the spiritual welfare of its Christian employees, and incidentally to spread the message of Christ amongst the Indians. Towards the close of the eighteenth century when the Company became an important political power in India, it was realised by the authorities in England that "in matter of religions the natives of India were peculiarly sensitive", and therefore "any interference with the religion of the natives would eventually insure the total destruction of British power"¹ in India. Religious neutrality thenceforth became the watchword of the Company. With gradual expansion of Company's possessions the policy towards the missionaries rapidly changed from "encouragement to one of indifference, and indifference to one of hostility". At the time of the renewal of the Charter of the Company in 1793 when the Evangelicals like Charles Grant and Wilberforce proposed to insert a clause to send and maintain missionaries and teachers for the religious and moral improvement of the Indians, the Court of Directors stood opposed to it and the proposal was turned down by the Parliament. No wonder therefore when in the same year William Carey (1761-1834), the first British missionary, arrived in Calcutta, he was prohibited from preaching in its territory and he had no option but to make Serampur his headquarters under the Danish flag.

In early nineteenth century agitation was renewed in England for sending missions to India. It was considered absurd "when non-Christian rulers in Asia often gave missionary permission to preach the gospel in their kingdoms the Christian British should deny this elementary human right to the missionary"². The vigorous agitation which Wilberforce and others continued in collaboration with the Church Missionaries Society, the Bible Society, the London Missionary Society and other organisations and the publication of a number of papers and pamphlets succeeded in winning public support for "Christianising India". The

1. Dodwell, H. H., *Cambridge Modern History*, vi, p. 124.

2. Thomas, P., *Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan*, p. 177.

new Charter Act of 1813 permitted the missionaries "to go and reside in India under certain conditions". The result was the advent of missionaries to India from England and America and the appointment of a Bishop in Calcutta with jurisdiction over Company's territories. The Governor-General in Council was, however, enjoined to impress upon the officials of the Company the need for religious neutrality and non-interference in the religions of Indian subjects.

Carey with his coadjutors, Jasua Marshman (1768-1837) and William Ward (1769-1833), established Serampur Mission as a branch of the English Baptist Mission in January 1800. The patronage he received from Wellesly, financial apart, the appointment as a teacher at the Fort William College, had enabled him to carry on his mission successfully. In a pamphlet *An Enquiry into the Obligations of the Christians to use means for the conversion of Heathens* Carey emphasised the necessity of making the heathens useful members of society and that they should be reached only in their own language. During 1801-32, he translated the Bible into Bengali and forty other languages including one in Assamese. Krishna Pal, Carey's earliest convert (1800) was deputed to North-East India for the spread of the gospel. From his headquarters at Pandua, in the district of Sylhet, Pal carried on his mission and by 1813 he is said to have seven converts; of these two were Khasis who were baptised in the river Kushiara in presence of a large gathering including several chiefs (*siems*).¹ In 1829 a branch of the mission was set up at Gauhati under James Rae, a native of Damfriece, under the patronage of David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier. Rae's hopes to place the New Testament in every heathen temple were belied; up to 1836 only six individuals were baptised. His successor William Robinson lamented: "There are no sign of any good here, and when I consider for how many years brother Rae had laboured among these people in vain, my spirit began to drop within me, and I fear all my labour will prove same."²

1. Nalini Natarajan, *The Mission among the Khasis*, Shillong, p. 60.

2. *Serampur Periodical Accounts*, 1834, p. 34; *Ibid.*, September 1836, see Robinson Papers.

In the meantime the Second Great Awakening in America created an interest, amongst others, in foreign missions to spread the gospel in the non-Christian world. American Foreign Missionaries were inspired by the British Evangelicals in India. Carey's letters and pamphlets were widely read and the American Baptists in return provided funds and kept up regular communications with the mission at Serampur. The emergence of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Affairs in June 1810 introduced a new era in American foreign mission enterprise. It originated out of "Pious zeal" of five students of Theology of the Andover Seminary—Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, Samuel, J. Mills, Samuel Nott and Samuel Newell who declared their determination to go abroad for evangelisation. The generous donations received from American public provided the Board necessary funds for the pioneers who left with their families in two groups for India. The first under Judson and Newell reached Calcutta on 17 June 1812, but their disembarkation was rendered extremely difficult on account of the anti-missionary policy then followed by officials of the Company. The mediation of the Serampur missionaries eventually enabled them to reach Serampur. In disgust Newell left for Isle of Man ; Judson with his wife Ann Hasseltine later arrived in Rangoon and laid the foundation of Burmese Baptist Mission. Situation altered following the Charter Act of 1813 which had enabled the Baptists to start missions at Bombay and Ahmadnagar. This was followed by the extension of operations in Assam, Telugu country (Madras Presidency) and the arrival of the American Presbyterians in the Punjab, Lutherans in Madras and Methodists in United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.

II

Political and security reasons, not so much of evangelism, that had actuated the local authorities to welcome the missionaries into Assam or North-East Frontier. To "humanise" the Garos who were always at feuds and at times carried their raids into British districts, as early as 1826, Scott in cooperation with Bishop Herber of Calcutta sought to establish a school in their midst to instruct religious teaching apart from some useful arts. Although

a school was started at Singimari on the approval of the Government of Bengal,¹ Scott's scheme ultimately fell through on account of difficulties in having a suitable teacher to serve in the hills and his own preoccupation in the insurrection of the Khasis in the south. Soon after the assumption of office in 1834 Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor-General, also thought that pacification of the Khamtis and the Singphos, who continued to disturb the tranquility of the frontier, could be effectively done by the spread of the gospel ; and to that end he contacted initially the missionaries at Serampur. When the response was not encouraging the invitation was extended to the American Baptists to establish a mission at Sadiya. They were told that the language of the Shans or the people nearabout Sadiya was similar to that of the Burmese and might easily be acquired by a missionary who had resided in that country [i, 1]. The proposal reached at an opportune moment—soon after the Convention at Richmond which had decided “to enter into every unoccupied field” and “to extend their operations as widely as possible”.² Stimulated by the publication of Charles Gutzlaff's, *Journal of Two Voyages Along the Coast of China* (1831-2), the American Missionaries sought to start a mission in China. The early attempts that had been made by John T. Jones at Bangkok failed on the closed-door policy then followed by the Chinese government. The opposition of the Burmese government also prevented Rugenio Kincaid from penetrating into China from Upper Burma apart from spreading the gospel amongst the Shans in that quarter. A mission at Sadiya, it was fondly hoped, would enable the Baptists to convert the frontier tribes into Christianity and also open up an entrance into the Celestial Empire.³ Unhesitatingly the Board accepted the proposal and directed Revs. Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter then working at Moulmein to

-
1. On the understanding that the person employed be called a schoolmaster and not in the capacity of a missionary since the declared policy of the government was one of religious neutrality. CD 1831 ; 2 February, No. 4, para 70ff.
 2. Gammell, W., *A History of American Baptist Mission*, Boston, 1850, p. 211.
 3. See *infra*, p.5.

commence a mission at Sadiya. Already Brown learnt the Burmese language and Cutter had experience in printing. Accompanied by their families and with a printing press the missionaries reached Sadiya on 23 March, 1836 [i, 2].

To his utter disappointment Brown found on arrival that the only Shans within reach were a few scattered Khamti hamlets and the main body for whom he had come lived beyond the mountains. He had no alternative but to commence operations with the Khamtis and the Assamese in and around Sadiya. The Khamtis had a language similar to that of the Shans of the north of Ava while the Assamese had a written language, but no dictionary nor any grammar. Overcoming initial difficulties he printed a few tracts and text-books and made preparations for establishment of schools. A reinforcement consisting of the families of Revs. Jacob Thomas and Miles Bronson arrived in Calcutta in April 1837. On the upward voyage along the Brahmaputra, unfortunately, Thomas was suddenly killed when within sight of Sadiya by the falling of a large tree on the boat from the bank of the river. Brown and Cutter had to direct their attention to the Assamese and the Khamtis, and Bronson was to move to Jaipur which was nearer the Singphos and the Shans in the valley of the Hukwang between Assam and Burma. About this time the Serampur Mission which was on a languishing state relinquished its operation in favour of the Baptists. The resumption of Upper Assam (October 1838) followed by the annexation of Muttock (November 1839) opened up to the Baptists the whole valley of the Brahmaputra for evangelisation. Representation of the missionaries apart, Jenkins strongly urged the Board to extend operations by increasing the strength of the existing mission. The hopes of the missionaries doomed to bitter disappointment. Following Richmond Convention the operations of the Board had increased beyond its resources ; without increase in its revenue it must "either recall some of the missionaries or go deeper and deeper in debt".¹ Assam Mission was told "unless contribution to the treasury are increased a much greater

1. Domestic circular, *BMM* 1838, p. 261.

ratio...the mission cannot be supported even in their present state”.

To make matters worse the Singphos were in the meantime assuming a hostile attitude, and rumours were afloat of a Burmese invasion and the formation of an anti-British confederacy of the hill tribes on this side of the Patkais which so much alarmed the people that many passed nights in jungle while others sat up in fear of a surprise attack. In early morning of 28 January 1839, the cantonment at Sadiya was stormed by the Khamtis burning houses, cutting down everyone on the way, and killing a large number of men, women and children including Major White, the Commandant, Assam Light Infantry Battalion. Hardly was there time for the missionaries to escape ; they slipped in a little canoe to nearby river and passed the night “every moment expecting an attack from the savages who might be lying in wait to rush upon, massacre them...or take them as slaves.” “Sadiya turned out to be a barred door rather than a open gateway to China.”¹ The continued hostility of the Singphos and the Shans compelled Brown and Cutter to move to Jaipur, centre of growing tea cultivation, in anticipation of increase in population and having access to the Khamtis, the Nagas and the Singphos.

On his arrival at Jaipur in May 1838 when Bronson found that the Nagas were more numerous than the Singphos, he decided to start a mission in their midst. The task was indeed formidable. After having collected a Naga vocabulary and crossing dense forests he arrived at Naga village Namsang (at present in Tirap Frontier), a centre of salt trade on 8 January, 1839. The *Bura Khunbao*, the Naga Chief, suspected him to be an English spy who had come on a reconnoitering mission with the ultimate object of annexing his territory. Bronson’s geniality, soft words and persuasive manners eventually won the hearts of the Nagas who welcomed him, fed him and built a house to which later he brought his wife and little child Marie. To work in the Naga field there had also arrived the family of Cyrus Barkar and Bronson’s sister Miss Rhoda Bronson. Since Bronson had already opened

1. Sword, V. H., *Baptists in Assam, 1836-1936*, Chicago, 1936, p. 59,

a school and started operations Barkar returned to Jaipur and thence to Sibsagar.

Overwhelming odds notwithstanding, within a period of eight months several Naga boys could read their own language and in Romanised Assamese. Bronson's letters to Jenkins not only reveal his clear vision and political wisdom but his intense desire to uplift the Nagas from their utter backwardness [ii, 62, 66-7]. The continued illness in the family and subsequent death of Rhoda brought to an end the laudable project ; Bronson himself had to leave the hills on grounds of health leaving the Nagas like a flock of sheep without a shepherd.

The unhealthiness of Jaipur and insecurity of the south-east frontier made it also necessary for Brown to move to Sibsagar, the most important station in Central and Upper Assam. Access to the Shans and the Singphos continued to be difficult and hazardous, and the missionaries had no alternative but to confine their attention to the people of the plains. The much-hoped for Shan mission thus came to an end and towards the close of 1843 Brown and Cutter with the printing press stationed themselves at Sibsagar, Barkar went to Gauhati and Bronson moved to Nowgong. With these three stations the Baptist Church was organised in Assam in January 1845. In each station the missionaries established one or more schools in which pupils, both boys and girls, were instructed by and large the doctrine of the gospel by ladies of the mission aided by local assistants or recruits from Calcutta. Of these Nowgong Orphan Institution founded by Bronson in 1843 aimed at collecting from all parts of the province orphans and destitutes of either sex and to train them up under Christian influence knowledge of useful occupation and of the gospel.

In spite of the independent and scattered character of the missions, from the very beginning the missionaries consulted each other on matters of common interest. Major issues apart—whether of the language or of a mission and at times even in routine matters—appointment, transfer, leave, disciplinary measures—no decision was taken without the concurrence of the co-missionaries and the same was reported to the Mission Rooms for approval. In 1851 to coordinate the activities of the three missions the Baptist Association of Assam was formed, and

in its first meeting at Sibsagar, 30 October, a constitution was made "to counsel and assist each other" in extension of operations [i, 29].

In 1841 Bronson baptised Nidhiram *alias* Nidhi Levi Farwell, the first Assamese convert at Jaipur. This was followed by three others—Batiram, Ramsing and Kolibor. While the spiritual harvests continued to be disappointing, the missionaries found the field too extensive to be worked by a few scattered individuals. The repeated appeals made by the missionaries though persuaded the Board to depute in 1848 Revs. A. N. Danforth and I. J. Stoddard to the Assam field, ill-health forced Barkar to leave for home in 1851, and on the way he expired. Dauble, originally a German Lutheran who being baptised joined the mission at Nowgong, also died of Cholera in March 1853. In the same year Oliver Cutter, the soul of the printing establishment, had to be dismissed "on charges of immoral conduct".¹ But the mortal blow to the mission was the departure of Nathan Brown in early 1855 not so much of "hard work" or reasons of health as of "mental anguish".² Professor Solomon Peck, the Foreign Secretary, who paid a visit to Assam in early 1854 stood opposed to the policy and programme of the Assam Mission. In his view the missionaries should have communication direct with the Board not through the Association nor in consultation with each other. He wanted the abolition of the Orphan Institute which trained up native assistants so essential to the mission. "The closure of the Orphanage and the "divide and rule policy" then laid down by the Foreign Secretary were humiliating to the missionaries which the seniormost member Brown could hardly overcome.³

In fact Professor Peck simply communicated the wishes of the Home Board which had faced for several years acute financial crisis. The Baptist Churches in South following anti-Slavery agitation and impending Civil War withdrew from the Union, and this had adversely affected the finances of the Northern

1. *Proceedings of the Assam Mission*, Letter Bronson, 17 September, 1852.

2. Sword, V. H., *op. cit.*, p. 87.

3. Downs, F. S., *The Mighty Works of God*, Gauhati, 1971, p. 42.

Mission. The Board would therefore neither extend its field nor even maintain the existing ones. "The home mail instead of words of cheers brought discouragement of suppression of schools, dismissal of native assistance, stopping of the press, translation of tracts."¹ What was worse, the repercussions of the Mutiny (1857-8) rendered it extremely difficult for the missionaries to carry on their operations. Whiting at Sibsagar for a while remained hidden in the north bank while Bronsons escaped in a canoe to Gauhati on way to America. "Other missionaries owing either to dread of mutiny or of disease were obliged to take furlough so that in 1858 there was only one in the field."²

III

Towards the close of 1858 the arrival of two naval brigades from Calcutta and the energetic measures adopted by the local authorities restored to some extent the confidence of the missionaries. With the end of the Civil War in America (1865) more funds and assistance were available for the Assam field. The missionaries had realised in the meantime that they must turn to the hills rather than the plains. Already the Mikirs in the neighbourhood of Nowgong had attracted the attention of the mission. In early sixties C. F. Tolman and E. P. Scott started work and toured the hills, but jungle fever drove both of them out of the hills, and Scott in his second attempt to resume operations died of cholera in May 1868. Freed from religious prejudices, the Cacharis at the foot of the hills north of Kamrup and Darrang, were found apparently ready for receipt of the gospel. Barkar is reported to have made several excursions amongst these tribes and had discussions on the subject with those who came to Gauhati Church.

The local authorities were no less interested than the missionaries in the spread of the gospel amongst the Garos on the west. Conversion of the Garos to Christianity, reference has already been made, was one of the objectives which had actuated Scott

-
1. Brown, E. W., *The Whole World Kin, Experience Among Remote Tribes and other Labors of Nathan Brown*, Philadelphia, 1870, p. 270.
 2. Sword, V. H., *op. cit.*, p. 90; *AR, BMM*, July 1858, pp. 249-50.

in the establishment of a school at Singimari. In 1837 Jenkins also sought to start a mission at Gauhati inasmuch as "to put an end to their outrages, there could be no other means than a reformation of their feelings and habits through Christian religion".¹ The evangelisation amongst the Garos may be said to have begun in February 1863 on the conversion of Ramkhe and Omed through the influence of Kandura, an Assamese convert. When Bronson visited the hills in early 1867, he found under the patronage of the Deputy Commissioner Omed had established at Rajsimla a centre of the mission and Ramkhe a school at Damra. So faithfully had these assistants laboured in the hills despite "reproach, ridicule and even threat of life" that Bronson had twenty-six Garos to baptise at Rajsimla wherein a Church was organised towards the close of the year ordaining Omed as its pastor. I. J. Stoddards, then at Gauhati, and M. B. Comforts, a new missionary, were transferred to Gowalpara which had become the headquarters of the new mission. Inhospitable climate apart, hostilities of the tribesmen made it difficult for the missionaries to establish a mission at Tura in spite of repeated requests made by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Even a native preacher could not enter into the hills save at the risk of losing his head. The annexation of the hills (1872-3) and the arrival of energetic missionaries Revs. M. C. Mason and E. G. Phillips in 1874 was a turning point in the Garo field. Not only was the headquarters removed to Tura (1876) but the mission made remarkable progress at the close of the century. By 1910 the membership of the Church rose to four thousand and it proved to be one of the "most self-reliant, prosperous and promising mission".²

The immigrants who had come mostly from Chota Nagpur area to work in tea gardens afforded a fertile field for evangelisation. They had become familiar with Christianity to some extent from the missions of the Gossener Society of Germany and having a religion similar in its nature to that of the animists

1. *FPP*, 1846 ; 14 March, No. 49.

2. Mason, N. P., "These Seventy-five Years", *Minutes Assam Baptist Mission Conference*, 1911, pp. 55ff; E. F. Merriam, *A History of American Baptist Mission*, Philadelphia, 1900, p. 124.

of Assam. In the initial stages although some of the planters resisted the entry of the missionaries considering "Christian laborers would be a liability", towards the close of the century they gave way and the spread of the gospel under C. E. Petric and John Firth made rapid progress amongst immigrants. (*Infra* pp. 218-20).

The activities in the Naga field remained suspended until the arrival of Rev. E.W. Clark to the Sibsagar mission in 1869. Abandoning comparatively fruitless work among the Assamese he directed his attention to the Nagas in the south and tea-garden labourers in the district. Under his encouragement Godhula *alias* Rutus Brown learnt AO dialect and made several trips to Molungyimsen or Deka Haimong to spread the message of Christ. He was instrumental in having baptised nine AOs at Sibsagar in November 1872. Clark himself arrived at Haimong in the following month and baptised fifteen Nagas who with earlier converts erected a chapel at the village. *Inner Line Regulations* (1873) prevented Clark from opening a mission amongst the AOs. Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, expressed his inability to make any distinction "between a planter and missionary, and telling the one he must stop at a line which the other may transgress".¹ When the missionary was welcomed by the Nagas themselves, Government of Bengal found no reason whatever to prevent the missionary from work. In 1876 when Clark made his way to Haimong he found the Nagas raiding villages or their own village were under attack. "Even when there were no actual attacks the village was on constant alert which was just as disruptive of normal life. The Christian Nagas were naturally expected to participate in the defence of the village as well as its raids. Their reluctance to do so as well as to participate in village festivities that involved drinking made them increasingly unpopular and objects of persecution."² Despite overwhelming odds, Clark found a new centre at Molung and in the following year when Mrs Clark joined her husband the mission made much headway in evangelisation. In 1885, on

1. *BJP*, 1873 ; January, No. 49.

2. Downs, F. S., *The Mighty Works of God*, pp. 66 ; also *infra*, pp. 60-1.

the arrival of Dr S. W. Rivenburg, Clark went on furlough after nine years of unwearied service during which the Christian communities amongst the AOs grew "from nothing to 79 members"; hostilities of the natives turned into friendship for they had learned to "love and rever him".¹ In 1893 Revs. S. Perrain and F. Haggard joined the mission which was moved in the next year to Impur in the interior of the hills.

Not the AOs alone, the attention of Clark, the father of Naga missions, was directed towards the Angamis and the Lhotas. At his request the Board appointed Rev. C. D. King to start a mission among the Angamis, the most powerful and warlike of the Naga tribes. The uprising of the Kohima men compelled the missionary to settle for a time at Samaguting, near Dimapur, and thence at Sibsagar. On the restoration of peace in 1880 King moved to Kohima and started a school with the aid of Assamese convert Punaram. Kohima Baptists Church was organised in 1893 but its success was disappointing.² The Lhotas on the north-east were no less warlike and turbulent. The establishment of an outpost at Wokha following the murder of Captain Butler enabled Clark to persuade Rev. W. E. Witter to start a centre at that station. Hardly had he opened a school with Assamese as the medium of instruction, ill health compelled him to quit the hills and operation amongst the Lhotas was carried on from Kohima and nearabout stations.³

In 1895 Rev. W. Pettigrew, earlier a member of the Church of England, started evangelisation in north-east of Imphal. The opposition of the animist Nagas made it difficult in his early attempts to open a centre in the Mao area. The Hinduised Meties too prevented him to start a mission in the plains in spite of his friendly relations with Major Maxwell, Political Agent, Manipur. However, he was successful in opening a school and spreading the gospel amongst the Tankhuls,

-
1. Sword, V. H., *op. cit.*, p. 108; Perrine, S. A., "Report from the AO Field", *Fourth Triennial Conference*, 1895.
 2. Rivenburg, S. W., "Historical Sketch of the Angami Naga Mission", *Jubilee Papers*, pp. 84-5. Mason, N. P., *op. cit.*, pp. 45ff.
 3. *Ibid.*

and by 1901 about a dozen of Nagas and Kukis accepted Christianity.¹

At the end of the century though the Baptists made a beginning in the AO area, the progress of evangelisation was slow in the Naga field. Independent in bearing and exclusive in spirit the Angamis not only refused to accept Christianity, but openly resisted the infiltration of the new faith. Even amongst the AOs, Clark's success "has not been at all commensurate with his efforts"² mainly because of the reluctance of the Nagas to abandon their habits of eating opium, drinking rice-bear³ and participation in anti-Christian rites and ceremonies. Since 1920s the Baptists were immensely successful in the spread of the gospel amongst the AOs as well as the Lhotas and the Semas. At the end of the Second World War not only the Baptist churches were on the increase in the land of the Angamis, but the evangelists penetrated even into the unadministered area, the habitat of the Chakhsangs, Sangtams, Konyak and other tribes.⁴

IV

Opinion differs as to official patronage to the American missionaries. Gammell speaks eloquently of the liberal contributions made and keen interest shown by the British residents.⁵ Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson were on the other hand critical of patronage of the English officials [i, 85-6]. True, higher officials like Jenkins were more of administrators than evangelists; whatever assistance they rendered to the Baptists was motivated by their primary objectives—security of the frontier and welfare of the masses. Nonetheless, European officials, both civil and military, made generous contributions

-
1. Downs, F. S., *Christianity in North-East India*, Gauhati, 1983, pp. 117ff.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.82, also *Census of India*, 1891, i, p.150.
 3. F. P. Haggard wrote, "A number of members were confirmed opium-eaters...and total number of converts was 100." "All drank liquor (with the exception of six or seven). Indeed these people carry drinking to such an extent that no church, however, well up in other points could stand against its ravage." *ABFMS*, February 20, 1895.
 4. Downs, F. S., *op. cit.*, pp. 133ff.
 5. Gammell, *A History of American Baptist Mission*, p. 221.

to the missionaries in their operations. Jenkins not only provided, as promised, a printing press but made regular contributions and offered constructive suggestions for the spread of the gospel. It was through his recommendations again a monthly grant of rupees one hundred was made to the Namsang mission despite religious neutrality of the government. But for the protection and aid of Captain Morton, PA Goalpara, it would have been extremely difficult for the pioneers to make much headway in the mission among the animist Garos. Contributions apart, Captain Hannay on his transfer to Sibsagar (1843) presented his brick building for the use of the printing establishment.¹ Professor Downs rightly concludes: "While the missions were primarily concerned with the propagation of the Gospel...they did find the government useful. It lent prestige to their religion...provided financial support for their institutions and gave them, government granted monopoly on education in many areas, an invaluable instrument of influence far beyond anything that such a small group of people could ordinarily have on an alien society."²

Active cooperation and help notwithstanding, immense were the difficulties that had to be confronted by the missionaries in their operations in Assam. From home to reach the field of operation hitherto the boat took over six months. The hazards in a upward voyage along the Brahmaputra could better be imagined than described. In the field they were to labour in a difficult terrain intereseected or bordered by hills and trackless forests infested with wild animals and under an enervating climate wherein malaria, *kalazar* and cholera were once endemic, and which carried away not infrequently heavy toll of human lives. Communication was extremely difficult even in plains where no other transport other than human bearer was available. To ascertain customs, usages, languages and temperaments of diverse racial elements posed indeed a problem for the missionaries, for which carrying their kits they had to travel

1. C. A. Bruce, Superintendent, Government Tea-plantation, J. T. Gordon, PA Nowgong and Furnell, Medical Officer, Sibsagar rendered all possible assistance for the success of the mission. *The Whole World Kin*, p. 224.

2. Downs, F. S., *op. cit.*, p. 279.

villages one after another invariably on foot¹ resting at night in open or at *Namghors* which served in those days as rest house to weary travellers. Apart from forlorn nature of the station, rigours of climate and lack of assistance, the missionaries had to encounter distrust and suspicion of the hillmen to whom all the *sahibs* or whitemen were the spies of the English.²

The indomitable courage and fortitude with which the Baptists braved the distance, isolation, deaths and discouragements had enabled them to sow the seeds of the gospel both in the hills and plains. They have succeeded so far, in establishing not less than four thousand churches having over three lacs of members.³ Nonetheless as V. H. Sword remarks : "Assamese for whom the mission had yielded Sadiya and Jaipur had failed to accept Christianity."⁴ In 1886, i.e., after half a century, the membership of the Brahmaputra Valley stood at 845, of which 496 were Garos and 43 Mikirs. According to Professor Downs only 92 of the plains Assamese were Christians. Even in 1936, as he says, the Gauhati field reported as membership of 3,516 but only 464 were classified as Assamese.⁵ Considering the population of the valley and the untiring efforts made by the Baptists, small percentage of converts was definitely a sign of the failure of evangelisation in the plains. The reasons were not far to seek. The fundamental difference between Christianity and Hinduism made it difficult for average intelligent Assamese to accept Christianity. To them Hinduism is not dogmatic but synthetic and comprehensive "seeking unity not in a common creed but in a common search for truth".⁶ They would regard Christianity as true, but they would not accept it ; for they

1. Thus towards the end of 1844 Brown travelled on foot from Sibsagar to Guwahati over two hundred miles in order to visit interior of villages to ascertain personally the characteristics of diverse racial elements who inhabited in them.
2. In this regard the Assamese priests and religious heads were placed on an advantageous position (*Infra*, p.lv).
3. *The Baptist Leader*, xxxiv, 1895, No. 2, p.1.
4. Sword, V. H., *op. cit.*, p. 119.
5. Downs, F. S., *The Mighty Works of God.*, pp. 82-3.
6. Radhakrishnan, S., "Hinduism and the West" *Modern India and the West*, p. 339.

would consider Hinduism as equally true. In fact, as A. K. Gurney realised, "they had an accommodating theory". They would say "for the Europeans Christianity is good ; for the Hindoo Hindooism ; for the Mussalmans Muhammedanism".

V

The missionaries never failed to bring to the notice of the Home Board the political events which had affected their operations. On their arrival they found Lower Assam under the authority of the government while Upper Assam was held by a tributary Ahom prince—Raja Purandar Singha. The territory east of the river Buridihing was occupied by the Moamaria or Muttock chief subject to the payment of a nominal tribute. The frontier was in turmoil on account of the threatening attitude of the Singphos and the intrigues of the Burmese with a view to reoccupying their lost possessions. Graphic was the narrative of the tragedy at Sadiya in the wake of the insurrection of the Khamtis, 28 January 1839. References have been made of the deposition of Purandar Singha (1838) and the annexation of Muttock (1839) which had extended their field of operation. In regard to the causes, nature and extent of the Mutiny (1857-8) the mission archives provide corroborative evidence to official documents. Danforth's belief that the Mussalmans joined hands with the rebels with the object of establishing "Islamism once and for ever", is not borne out by the fact that several Muslim officers of the Regiment actively supported the cause of the Ahom monarchy.¹ In any case the preparations made by the rebels and the alarm thereof spread far and wide. To protect the lives of English men and women there was not a single European soldier in the North-East Frontier. Every precaution had to be taken, and the missionaries then assembled at Gauhati had to undergo military training. They heaved a sigh of relief on the arrest of the ring-leaders, including the young Raja ; but the situation continued to be disquieting until the arrival of two naval brigades from Calcutta for the defence of the frontier.

The American missionaries not being involved in political fortunes of Great Britain were not unoften critical of the policy

1. Barpujari, H. K., Assam : In the Days of the Company (1980), p. 185.

and action of the government. Rightly they traced the origin of the uprising of 1862, the Phulaguri revolt, to the multiplication of taxes, particularly the imposition of license and income tax. In their view European officials were largely responsible for the use of spirituous liquor amongst the natives in and around Gauhati. Condemning the introduction of government opium Whiting maintained "this act of the government has done more than anything else to spread the use of opium...it is hopeless that a confirmed opium eater will ever leave off the use of the article". The missionaries were no less critical of the administration of justice and police in the days of the Company, and their views receive corroboration in the *Observations on the Administration of Assam* by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan.

VI

The journals and letters throw a flood of light on growth of townships in the valley of the Brahmaputra. In early thirties Sadiya was the headquarters of the district of the same name. Located in the vicinity of several rude tribes, it had a strategic importance of its own. The insurrection of the Khamtis and the growing insecurity of the frontier compelled the missionaries to take asylum at Jaipur on the Buridihing enroute to Ava. Its location in the midst of tea areas and the vicinity of coal-bed, oil and salt-springs hold out before them the prospects of a growing township. The hopes were soon belied ; hostilities of the Singphos apart, insalubrity of climate again forced the mission to move to Sibsagar, the most important township in Central and Upper Assam with a population not less than five thousand. In 1841 the headquarters of the district was shifted to Sibsagar from Jorhat which was the capital of the last Ahom monarchy. Situated on the bank of the navigable Dikhow communication by water from Sibsagar was highly convenient. Two hours by boat would take one to Brahmaputra, two days ride to Dibrugarh and one day to Jorhat. Several roads constructed by the former government linked up Sibsagar with Jaipur, Muttock and even Gauhati. Besides the court, jail and hospital, Sibsagar had a government school where English and Bengali were taught.

The mission premises and official quarters were located on the bank of the long tank Siva-sagar [i, 74].

In close proximity to Sibsagar located *Rangpur*, *Gorgaon* and *Jorhat* "places which the original Assamese (Ahom) made the centre of their power and influence, where kings always resided and in which Assamese language is spoken in its greatest purity". During cold season Ahom kings resided at Rangpur, two miles from Sibsagar, where Barkar found in 1842 two temples, a two-storey building (*Rang-ghar*) formerly used by the kings for witnessing sports of wild beasts, remains of a palace and other buildings. During rains the Rajas spent at Gorgaon on the Dikhow where Brown saw a magnificent palace, several brick edifices and an arched gateway at the entrance of the fortified town surrounded by a light wall. On the other side of the river located *Nazira* then developing into a flourishing township, the headquarters of the Assam Tea Company. Importance of Jorhat had dwindled since the transfer of the district headquarters to Sibsagar. Situated on the bank of the shallow Disoi or Bhogdoi, with its zig-zag and muddy roads, it continued to be the residence of the former royal family and a section of the learned Assamese. *Titabar*, *Kacharihat* and *Golaghat* were the centres of cotton trade with the Nagas.

Already in 1850 Dibrugarh had developed into a cosmopolitan town of commercial importance. Besides Assamese, as Whiting records, the population consisted of "Bengali, Nepali, Manipuri in the regiments", and in bazar "Khasi, Nora, Abor, Mishmi, Nagas and others" each having a dialect of its own, but Assamese was the medium for all those who resorted to for trade. *Tezpur* on the north bank was considered to be the healthiest station in Assam and was the headquarters of the district of Darrang. But the most populous part of the district was fifty miles below *Desh Darrang*, the present *Mangaldoi*, accessible by a branch of the *Brahmaputra*. This was hitherto the headquarters of the district; on account of its unhealthiness it was moved to *Pura* or *Tezpur* in 1835. The importance of *Bishwanath*, too, ceased since 1839 on the transfer of the headquarters of Assam Light Infantry to Sibsagar.

In 1835 the headquarters of the district of Central Assam or Nowgong was also shifted from Rongagora to the new village or *Nagaon* on the bank of the Kolong. The people of this village were reported to be very enlightened and the total population as estimated by J. T. Gordon, PA Nowgong, was over two lakhs and considerable number of them were Mussalmans. From Nowgong by road one would reach Kaliabar with an industrious and thriving population. Writing in December 1841 Brown says : "Nowgong to Gauhati 70 miles. The banks of both sides of Kullung for about 30 miles below we find covered with dense population, surpassing anywhere I met any part of Assam."

Gauhati was not only the headquarters of the district of Kamrup but the residence of the Commissioner of Assam. By official sources population was six thousand in 1831 ; rose to ten thousand according to the estimate made by Danforth in 1849, majority being Assamese, about one-tenth Bengali and a few European residents. In 1874 on the shifting of the capital to Shillong, Gauhati became the gateway of Assam. Stretching along both sides of the river Brahmaputra for several miles, communication between two parts was kept up by steamer-ferry making several trips each way. Even in 1853 it appears from an article in the *Orunodoi pucca* court building and the treasury had been erected on the bank of the Brahmaputra and the Commissioner's office near the Dighali tank. The cantonment was located near present Paltan bazar and police outposts at Latasil and another on the Bharalu. The mission premises, six acres, lay on the bank of the river with a Macadamised road on the river side with large trees both ornamental and protection against encroachment. Of the three important bazars, two at the either end of the town catered to the need of the local people while the Planters Stores and Agency of the third (present Panbazar) supplied the requirement of European residents.¹

Since sixties, mention has been made in journals and letters, Assam was fast rising into importance. Lands were occupied everywhere by the planters, and even the hills nearabout Gauhati were covered with tea-gardens. A beginning was made for the

1. *The Orunodoi*, vii, June 1855, pp. 90-2 ; Burdetti, C., *Jubilee Papers*, p. 45.

construction of a trunk road through the valley from Bengal to Sadiya ; and already telegraph line extended from Bengal had reached Gauhati. Weekly steamers carried passengers and freight from Calcutta while two railway lines connected the interior of the valley with the main artery of commerce—the Brahmaputra. The upward voyage to Sadiya by country boats, hitherto, took over three months ; in eighties mail steamers connecting Dhubri with railways from Calcutta enabled passengers to reach Upper Assam in less than a week. The close of the century saw, as recorded by Rev. Clark, the completion of the Bengal-Assam Railway throughout the valley and the preparation of an ambitious project connecting it across the south-eastern hills with the Burman Railways which had already been proposed to extend to the borders of China.

On the other hand, post-Mutiny period saw acute scarcity and abnormal rise in prices of essential commodities. This was occasioned by the occurrence of a famine in the wake of an abnormal draught, but mainly because of the importation of labourers to meet the increasing demand of the planters, and no less of the government in the construction of roads, telegraph lines and other public works. In food stuff Assam was not a surplus area, and hence the prices of every article of consumption increased three to four times and as a corollary the cost of labour shot up several times. “Flush with money”, wrote Bronson, “European tea-planters were eager to employ every man, every servant, ready to buy up every article of food for themselves and their labors at any price”. The outcome was depreciation in monetary value : “A Rupee now goes about half as they formerly”. The salaries of the government officials increased all round. The missionaries appealed for relief in yearly appropriations.

VII

Evangelisation was the primary objective of the missionaries. *Zayats* (preaching booths) were set up at places where people would come and hear the gospel and enquire into the mysteries of truth. Frequent tours were made by the preachers to address gathering at *hats*, markets, fairs and religious assemblies

distributing portions of scriptures, tracts and catechisms which set forth in a pointed manner errors of Hinduism or Islam.

The spread of elementary education became necessary so that the Bible could be read and understood. Within two months of her arrival Mrs Cutter started a school at Sadiya with an enrolment of six which soon rose to twenty. She taught some of them in English elementary books—Mission Primer, Nursery books, etc., published by American Sunday School Union. It posed a problem for her to teach in English principles of Christianity unless books were prepared in Spelling Lessons, Primer, Nursery books and Scriptural Lessons in vernacular. In 1837 Mrs Brown also opened a school for girls at Sadiya and in its vicinity three village schools were started by Cutter followed by one each at Japiur and Namsang, the latter for education of the Nagas. Mission schools were gradually on the increase. In 1844-5 in the district of Sibsagar there were eleven schools and in and around Gauhati five in operation. To cater to the needs of the orphan and destitute children of either sex an Orphan Institute was started at Nowgong in 1843 [i, 100]. They were to be trained up with the object of producing teachers and catechists, and those manifest less ability to be taught in elementary education and such trades as would enable to earn their own livelihood. The Baptists emphasised the education of women, and to that end at each station started boarding schools for girls.

With the publication of a number of textbooks instructions were imparted in Assamese, Tai and English on reading, writing, arithmetic and elements of geography. Classes were usually started with prayers and endeavours were made to instil lessons on Christianity. The employment of Brahmin teachers were avoided lest they would neutralise the effects of religious teaching. Sons and wards of the priestly classes were, however, admitted into these institutions where medium of instruction was Assamese ; all the more there was a growing demand for these schools which provided the three R's—the passport for minor posts under the government.

The missionaries were under the impression that the masses in Assam were illiterate mainly because of the influence of the priestly classes who deliberately kept them ignorant. Their

strategy was not to attack them personally, but to enlighten the masses by opening up village schools. The Baptist Union in its meeting at Nowgong in 1850 proposed to have more village schools under supervision of mission heads and this would "hasten the desirable day when the Assamese would be able to read in their own language the wonderful work of God".¹ These schools would of course be *auxiliaries* to the work of evangelisation—the legitimate work of the mission. They would expose the false science inwrought with idolatry and so to help their common overthrow. They would afford opportunities for preaching to the public with them and would raise up native authors who would give their masses a Vernacular Christian literature. The Foreign Secretary, during his visit to Assam, doubted much whether such schools should be multiplied to retain their role as *auxiliaries* in consideration of heavy cost and labour involved. It was brought home to the Assam Mission that "schools are not a pre-requisite to the preaching of the gospel" and that "the demand for common school will be met at no distant day...by the civil government" and that "language in these schools will be the Vernacular as soon as suitable textbooks can be obtained".²

The radical change in policy and consequent retrenchment dwindled the number of schools and enrolment. The first casualty was the Orphan Institute which ceased to exist in 1856. The enrolment at the Sibsagar girls' school dropped down to three in 1862 while in two schools at Gauhati to twelve which stood at one hundred and twelve in four schools in 1851. The mission received its final blow on the transfer of power to the Crown in 1858 when the authorities in England reverted to the policy of religious neutrality in education with a feeling that the missionaries were no less responsible for the outbreak of the Mutiny. Missionary institutions were placed under supervision and control of secular officials and religious courses were totally excluded from the curriculum of studies.³ A sudden change was, however, considered impolitic in tribal areas of Assam wherein teaching in

1. Annual Meeting of the Assam Mission, 1850, *BMM*, May 1852, pp. 137ff.

2. Report of the Foreign Secretary, *BMM*, February 1855, p. 37.

3. *CD*, 1859 ; 7 April, No. 4, paras 4 and 59.

the Bible and scriptures was considered neither "objectionable nor dangerous".¹ Without adhering to the directives therefore Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, rendered grant-in-aid to the Baptists for the spread of education. In 1871 in the district of Nowgong eight schools were located in Mikir hills—all receiving grants from government.² In the same year besides a Normal School as many as eleven schools were started by the native Christians in Garo Hills. In 1878 the Government of Assam entrusted the entire education of the Garos to the Baptists assuring them with necessary funds. As a result by 1892 the number of mission schools in Garo Hills rose over a hundred.³ The success of the missionaries in the field of female education was also remarkable. In 1907 the number of school-going girls in hills stood at 16% and in Garo Hills 25%.⁴

VIII

On his arrival Brown found the tribes nearabout Sadiya had diverse dialects and possessed no script of their own. Neither the Khamtis nor the Singphos understood the Shan language which was reported to be the language of these people and which Brown learnt on his way to Sadiya from Gowalpara by the Brahmaputra.⁵ From an Ahom *pundit* (teacher) he learnt that the Ahom language was identical with the Tai of the Khamtis and slightly varying from the Siamese. But this was subverted by the Assamese which he then thought to be "a sort of Barbarous Bengali". The immediate task before him was to give the people a written language. He had two alternatives: "expensive and difficult Bengali" and English. The choice fell on English for reasons explained in document [i, 112].

The tragedy at Sadiya and consequent insecurity in the frontier forced the Baptists to abandon the Shan mission and to concentrate on the Assamese whose language was intelligible to almost

1. CD, 1864; 23 January, No. 2, para 2.

2. *Fifty-Eighth AR*, July 1872, BMM, p. 264.

3. Carey, W., *The Garo Jungle Book*, pp. 141-3, 237 and 241; *Garo Hills Administrative Report*, 1878-9.

4. Orange H. W., *Quinquennial Review on the Progress of Education in India*, Calcutta, 1909.

5. Ward, Mrs S. R., *Glimpses of Assam*, p. 207.

all tribes in the neighbourhood. Though Roman script was used in the hills, they had to switch over to the Bengali rather to Assamese script in regard to Assamese publications and this received the approval of the Board. A linguist of repute¹, Nathan Brown discovered before long the independent character of the Assamese from the Bengali language and spoke eloquently of "its open, agreeable vocalization, its picturesque Sanskritic characters, its quaint inflexious idioms".² He not only wanted to make the Assamese the language of teaching and preaching, but to have the Assamese of the purest form as spoken in Upper Assam [i, 114]. It was this missionary who raised the earliest note of warning against the introduction of Bengali in the newly started village schools. "This makes it pretty certain," rightly he apprehended, "that Assamese as a distinct language in course of a few years will become extinct and Bengali supply its place". All the more, "This project has been for sometime in contemplation and now the government have set about the work very vigorously. There will be little doubt that it will succeed in effecting the change..."

The difficulties of obtaining duly qualified staff and paucity of the Assamese "to transact business in the manner practised under the Bengal Government" forced on the local authorities in the early days of the Company to recruit the *amlahs* or subordinate officials from the neighbouring districts of Bengal. The general belief that these *amlahs* introduced Bengali as the language of the courts and schools in Assam is not only unhistorical but wholly fallacious and not based on positive evidence.³ For their

1. *Infra*, see *Biographical Notes*.

2. *The Whole World Kin*, p. 416.

3. Mention may be made in this connection that Persian was then the court language of the Presidency of Bengal. In Assam, which then formed a part of the Presidency, Persian writers had to be recruited at a much higher salary, and were found to be extremely difficult to replace in cases of death or of long absence. As a panacea Persian was replaced by Bengali in the courts of Assam. In 1836 *Assam Code* was translated into Bengali. A year earlier Bengali formed a major department in the newly-started government school at Gauhati while in twenty-one village schools referred to by Brown, Bengali was taught to turn out minor officials in the revenue department. In fact the process was accelerated by Jenkins as explained by him in document i, 122,

administrative convenience the local authorities, not the *amlahs* of Bengal, introduced Bengali as the language of the courts and schools in Assam. To raise the voice of protest a middle class intelligentsia was yet to emerge¹ while the masses in general with the horrors of the Burmese marauders still fresh in their minds dared not to antagonise their saviours on the language issue. Whatever might be the policy of the government instructions were imparted in mission schools in Assamese. Bengali text-books were in use so long as these were considered indispensable for the preparation and printing of Assamese books.

The controversy over the language actually started in June 1853 when A. J. M. Mills, Judge, *Sadar Dewani Adawlat*, visited Assam to enquire into the state of administration in Assam. Missionaries apart, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Sub-Assistant, Nowgong, in his *Observations on the Administration* strongly urged substitution of Assamese in place of Bengali in schools of Assam.² "We made a great mistake", admitted Mills, "in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengali, and that Assamese must acquire it". Since it was too late to retrace the steps he recommended for consideration of the Council of Education, Dhekial Phukan's proposition—"the substitution of the Vernacular language in lieu of Bengalee, the publication of series of popular works in Assamese language and the completion of the course of Vernacular education in Bangalee".³ This was stoutly opposed by William Robinson, the Inspector of Schools, on grounds he explained in document, i, 118. A decision on the language issue became imperative to give effect to the essential recommendation of Wood's Despatch in 1854—the education of the masses in vernaculars at the elementary level. Towards the close of the same year, forwarding comments of all the

1. The Assamese gentry, hitherto, not only remained silent a spectator of the language issue, but a section of them advocated promotion of commercial and cultural contacts with Bengal. Even Haliram Dhekial Phukan, father of Anandaram, wrote a history of Assam in Bengali apart from contributing articles to the Bengali periodicals of the age. Anandaram and his close relative Gunaviram Baruah pressed for the replacement of Bengali by Assamese in all probability under the influence of the missionaries particularly Miles Bronson.

2. *Infra* p. 142_n.

3. Mills, A. J. M., *Report on Assam Appendix J*, (1854) para 29,

missionaries on Robinson's remarks, Bronson made a fervent appeal to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal to open to the Assamese "the natural means of their elevation to the means of learning sciences—and of reading in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God" [i, 119]. Robinson's remarks were forcefully refuted in a pamphlet *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and Vernacular Education in Assam*, by "A Native" printed and published by the Baptist Mission Press, Sibsagar (1855). Bronson himself addressed a letter to the Editor *The Friend of India* [i, 121] to espouse the cause of the Assamese, and in this he was immensely successful which is borne out by an editorial in the same paper extracts of which were published in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* (November 1855, p. 452).

On the departure of Brown and the premature death of Dhekial Phukan in 1859, Bronson had to carry on the protracted struggle almost single-handed against pro-Bengali elements who had in the meantime raised their heads.¹ It was no small compliment to Bronson that he created the public opinion which was hitherto non-existent in Assam. Scattered representations apart, over two hundred Assamese elite headed by Bronson submitted a memorial² to George Campbell on 9 April, 1872 which convinced the Lieutenant-Governor that the demands made by the Assamese were reasonable; that "Assamese was still the vernacular of the people", "it is taught in Missionary Schools", and that "there are books and Dictionary published in the Assamese language". Unhesitatingly Campbell decided on 9 April, 1873 that Assamese be introduced in schools and courts in the valley of the Brahmaputra subject to the condition that "when a class of twelve or more boys wish for it Bengali may be separately taught to them as a language".

-
1. There is hardly any evidence to show that they were vocal prior to the publication of the pamphlet by "A Native". Not only was there divergent views on the subject amongst the higher officials, no unanimity existed even among the Assamese as to whether Assamese of the purest form as advocated by the missionaries should replace Bengali in schools and courts in Assam. This had inevitably emboldened the pro-Bengali elements to carry on counter-agitation until it was resolved in April 1873.
 2. Memorial of Bronson and others, 9 March, 1872; see *Assam Commissioner File No. 471, 1862-73*.

To follow up the successes demanded rejuvenation and strengthening of the Assamese language and literature particularly reading materials for higher classes in schools. The American missionaries, though continued to publish literary works on useful subjects, the number of text-books published by them dwindled mainly because of the radical change in educational policy which laid stress on secular education and textbooks free from religious bias. It must, however, be remembered that they rendered yeoman service at a time when that was greatly needed. Even in the thirties they brought out *A Spelling Book, Alphabets and Spelling*, translation of *Worcester's Primers, History of Flood, History of Creation* and a hymn book in Assamese. Text-books apart, they published a series of children's literature, and innumerable of tracts, catechisms and hymns in Assamese. The Bible translated by Carey being found extremely faulty, Brown commenced its translation into Assamese in 1838 and completed it in 1846-7. His *Grammatical Notices of the Assamese Language* (1848) and particularly Bronson's monumental work on *Assamese-English Dictionary* (1867) laid the foundation of Assamese language on a solid basis. A revised version of Mrs H. B. L. Cutter's *A Vocabulary and Phrases* (1841) was published in 1864 by Mrs S. R. Ward under the title *Brief Vocabulary in English and Assamese*, and a second part of it by E. W. Clark as *Phrases in English and Assamese* was printed in 1877. A regular contributor to the *Orunodoi*, Nidhi Levi translated the Indian Penal Code and gave a new orientation to the Assamese poetry in his religio-literary poems. The translation of the Old Testament started by Bronson was completed in 1903 by A. K. Gurney who is also credited with several literary works.

In the collection, preservation, publication of manuscripts, both Ahom and Assamese, the American missionaries were the pioneers in the field. They also made a beginning of the ethnological, particularly numismatic studies in Assam by publishing facsimiles of innumerable coins of Ahom and Koch kings and Mughal emperors. It was to the lasting credit of these Baptists that they paved the way for Assamese journalism by the publication of *Arunudoi-Sambad Patra* later *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese newspaper periodical in January 1846. Primarily intended for

the spread of the gospel, through the pages of *Orunodoi* Pilgrim's Progress in a serial, scripture narratives, sketches of martyrs, A brief History of Apostles, Parables of Sower and Accounts of our Saviour "found their way into heathen homes". Even orthodox Assamese found it interesting and instructive since it embodied new ideas in attractive form besides subjects of general interest. Illustrative articles on geography, astronomy, natural history conveyed useful information while temperance, truthfulness, self-reliance and themes of similar nature attracted the attention of reading public. Disseminating western thought and learning the *Orunodoi* inspired the younger generation and prepared the ground for an intellectual awakening.

In regard to the tribal areas, whether in the hills or in plains, the general principle of the Baptists was that "all are to be taught in their own tongues the wonderful works of God". It was considered expedient in the initial stage that after preparation of two or three elementary books containing fundamental principle of Christianity efforts should be made to send native agencies to instruct their co-villagers through the medium of their own dialect the truths of the gospel. In cases of those tribes who were in the vicinity and had acquaintance with the Assamese operation might be commenced by preaching in Assamese. With respect to the Mikirs (Arleng) Miris (Mishing) Cacharis and Nagas, therefore, preaching and teaching were conducted in early stages through the Assamese language. The case was, however, otherwise with the Garos who were originally monosyllabic and had no alphabet or literature of their own. Their contact with plainsmen, Assamese and Bengali, in course of time brought about a process of assimilation, and as a result on the eve of British conquest numerous Sanskrit words enriched the vocabulary of the Garos. No wonder therefore the early missionaries carried on teaching and preaching through Assamese or Bengali language. Of the various dialects the Baptists accepted eventually *Chisak* and *Awe* as the standard form of dialects and directed their attention to the compilation of several religious and secular books.¹ The Nagas, whether western or eastern, carried on trade with the people of the plains

1. Kar, P. C., "An Outline History of Garo Literature", *North-Eastern Affairs, Annual*, 1973, pp. 29ff.

as well as with different tribes through the medium of Assamese. So much importance was given by the Nagas to learning of Assamese that youths of the powerful tribes, Khonomah and Jotsomah, were sent to Nowgong and Gauhati for education.¹

In view of infinite variety of dialects in the hills, in 1864 the Governor-General in Council laid down that the instructions be imparted either in English or in indigenous language of the hill people expressed in Roman character, and that Bengali may be continued as medium where there was a public demand for it.² At the official level therefore there were two schools of thought ; while Captains Jenkins and Gordon sought education of the Nagas through the medium of Assamese, Gregory, PO Naga Hills, desired, that instructions be imparted through English and Angami in Roman script. Hill people along with the acquisition of the plains language, he argued, had learnt "all the worst habits of chicanery and trickery of plainmen as well as absurd prejudices of caste from which they were originally free".³ In Garo Hills, while J. C. Haughten, Commissioner of Cooch Behar, desired Romanization of Garo language and instructions in English, Lieutenant Williamson, the Deputy Commissioner laid stress⁴ on Bengali on the ground that "The Garos are all desirous of acquiring Bengalee. When we consider how they are situated, surrounded as they are by Bengali speaking races with whom all their trading transactions must be carried on, I am not surprised at this wish and I think it should be gratified". Till the closing years of the last century, the local authorities depended by and large on the American Baptists for the spread of education and production of necessary literature and text-books in the hills. The role of the government being only a subordinate one, the ultimate decision was made by the missionaries. The American Baptist Union in its Conference at Tura in 1893 resolved that

-
1. Barpujari, S. K., "Naga Education in the Nineteenth Century", *Highlander*, i, 1973, pp. 24ff.
 2. *Bengal Educational Proceedings*, 1864 ; 8 January, No. 25 ; Resolution 8 January, 1864.
 3. *BJP*, 1866 ; October, No. 57.
 4. *FPP (A)*, 1874 ; August, No. 274.

Roman script be used for the hill tribes about Assam which have no written language on the ground that at no distant future they would "touch hands across the hills".¹ Simplicity of the script apart, the facilities of printing books all over the world, the convenience of working with the Burmese mission and the apprehension of contamination from the evil of mixing with non-Christians weighed heavily in their minds. Consequently as S. K. Choube rightly observes :² "The Khasis and the Garos are on the process of forgetting Bengali and the Nagas are estranged from the Assamese though the *lingua franca* of the Naga even today is a broken form of Assamese."

George Gillespie refers³ that the Baptists had reduced to writing as many as nineteen tribal dialects in which they brought out dictionaries, grammars and vocabularies. The foundation of the Garo language was laid by Miles Bronson's *Phrases in English and Garo* (1868) followed by W. J. Williams' *A Vocabulary of Garo and Koch Dialects*, Rev T. J. Keith's *Garo-Bengali-English Dictionary* (1873) and Ramkhe Momin's *Bengali and Garo Dictionary*. For the spread of the gospel the Baptists started translation of scriptures and the gospel. In 1871 Keith got the *Matthew* translated and the following year saw translations of *Matthew*, *Mark* and *John*. With the arrival of Revs, M. C. Mason and E. G. Phillips theological literature multiplied. Within a period of three years Mason completed translation of *Genesis* and Phillips *Galatians*, *Ephesians* and *Philippians*. By 1895 besides tracts, catechisms and hymns *The New Testament* was translated into Garo language. In 1879 the monthly *Achikni Ripen* (Garo's Friend) appeared and continued its publication for over thirty years. Compared to theological literature production of secular works, even textbooks was rather small. The close of the century saw the publication of a few Garo and Bengali Primers, Rapid Readers, an arithmetic and a book on hygiene *A Way to Health*. These were merely translations not original works.

1. *Assam Mission ; Third Triennial Conference*, 1893, p. 8.

2. Chaube, S. K., *Hill Politics in North-East India*, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 57-8.

3. Gillespie, G., "The Missionaries and Dictionary", *Indian Church History Review*, June 1977, pp. 31-44.

Secular textbooks were in use in government schools since the thirties of the present century.¹

In the Naga field, too, although stress was laid on theological literature some useful books were published in different dialects. By 1927 *The New Testament* was translated into AO and Angami language in addition to *Life of Joseph, Matthew, John and The Acts*. Rev and Mrs Clark were the pioneers in production of Primers, Readers, an arithmetic and an *AO-Naga Grammar with Phrases and Vocabulary* (1893), but Clark's significant contribution was his *AO-English Dictionary* (1911). Besides a Primer, spelling, arithmetic and a book on hygiene, Rivenburg brought out *Angami-English Phrases*. In addition to a few text-books W. E. Witters published a grammar and vocabulary of the Lotha tribes.²

IX

The journals and letters regularly forwarded by the missionaries, though embodied mostly their operations, programmes and policies, form an invaluable source material for the modern period of the history of Assam. Early heads of the missions were invariably highly educated men trained for accurate observation and scholarly writing and most of them were residents of Assam for several years. So their accounts like Father Monse-rett's *Commentaries* possess all the value of a contemporary narrative written from an independent point of view while these had an additional and unique claim to our attention as they illustrate better than any other source the lives and surrounding of the people at large with whom they came in closer touch in the propagation of their faith. We do not have in the accounts of these missionaries the chronicles of kings and warriors, their wars and conquests, successes and failures ; but a glimpse into the history of the people, their lives and conditions, customs and prejudices, hopes and aspirations and herein lies their significance.

-
1. Kar, P. C., *op. cit.* ; *Minutes of the Assam Mission Conference, Eleventh Session, 1911*, pp. 66-7.
 2. Alemchiba, M. AO, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, Kohima, (1970), pp. 160-1 ; *Third Triennial Conference*, p. 29 ; *Fourth Triennial Conference*, p. 42.

The missionaries found the valley of the Brahmaputra or Assam proper broadly divided into two parts—Lower and Upper Assam, and each again sub-divided into several districts. Demographic changes referred to by the missionaries support to a great extent official records of the period. These were approximations since no official census was taken till the seventies, and the data on which the estimates were made based on number of houses in each division and an average occupancy was taken. Naturally this was exclusive of the migratory elements like the boatman, petty traders, slaves, bondsmen and the *morokeas* or those who hired their services. Again for fear of enhancement of revenue innumerable houses were concealed from enumeration. On the other hand, amongst the tribals like the Mikirs and the Miris several families lived under the same roof which made the enumeration fictitious. The population which was 1,50,000 in 1850 rose to four millions in early 1880, the majority being Assamese, both Hindus and Mussalmans, and the rest, according to missionary papers, aboriginals and semi-Hinduised aboriginal nationalities. The bulk of the latter consisted of the Cacharis of the district of Goalpara and also of certain areas of Kamrup and Central Assam. The Ahoms of the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur were put in the same category. Over half of the Rajbansis and almost all the Hajongs of the valley were found in the district of Goalpara. The Lalungs and the Mikirs lived mostly in the districts of Nowgong and Kamrup while the immigrant Santals in the tea districts of Upper Assam.

Details of racial elements apart, flora and fauna and topography of the land, the mission records occasionally provide meteorological charts of climate and rainfall of some areas of Assam. Extreme humidity and heavy rainfall are the peculiarities of the climate of Assam. A tract covered with jungles and marshes under a subtropical climate is a dumping ground of malarial germs while dysentery, *kalazar* (black fever) and cholera were then endemic and at times carried away heavy toll of human lives. In 1851 one-tenth of the population of Gauhati was swept off by cholera. "The river has been filled with dead bodies and which now and then lodging upon the sand besides inviting crows, vultures and jackals caused such effuvia as almost to

prevent the passage of boatmen." When cholera broke out again in 1853 in several areas of Assam, Danforth reported "over 9,000 died in the district of Nowgong ; in Kamrup and Sibsagar the casualties were much greater. It was in every sense of word a land of death." Rigours of climate and epidemic notwithstanding, Brown remarks, "Assam is likely to be the richest country in India". Besides tea, iron and coal in immense quantities, the forests abound in *sum*, mulberry and other trees which fed three or four varieties of silk-worms, oil and salt-springs.

Agriculture was the mainstay of the people who raised by and large paddy, sugarcane and poppy. They produced only what was necessary, hardly was there any for sale or for a rainy day. Consequently in years of scarcity food had to be imported and in any case to feed the immigrants whose number steadily increased towards the close of the century. No wonder, therefore, a foreigner had to import from outside his requirements of daily use. The journals of course refer to the beginning of local trade at *hats* or markets which were resorted to by neighbouring villagers. In 1853 Barkar found at Rajabahar *hat*, south of Jorhat, Naga men and women bartaring ginger, cotton, pepper for salt, pewter, etc. The Nagas near Namsang, Bronson writes, lived entirely upon profits of their salt-springs and were daily seen on plains exchanging salt for their necessaries. He distributed tracts and addressed hundreds of Lalungs, Mikirs and Cacharis who thronged at the weekly *hat* at Sonarigaon on the bank of Kalang wherein rice, clothes, axes, hoes, *dahs*, etc., were bartared. Reference has also been made of a "splendid fair", for several weeks, north of Darrang. This was no other than Odalguri fair to which besides the Bhutias and the Tibetans, the Chinese and people from every part of Bengal assembled for trade.

Though extremely idolent and lacking in enterprise, the Assamese were simple-minded, good-natured and law-abiding people. The Baptists spoke eloquently of the hospitality of the Assamese. During his visits to the principal *satras* of Majuli Whiting was offered plantains, coconuts, rice and milk on behalf of the *Satradhikars*. In 1851 when Danforth refused to accept a fish from a poor man without paying for it, the latter begged

him to accept the same since he honoured him by visiting his place.

The accounts of the missionaries shed interesting light on the dress, jewellery, customs and usages of the age. In these they made no change even amongst native Christian girls although they preached a crusade against the social evils of the age—degraded position of women, child-marriage, widowhood and polygamy. To them the “twin sisters, ignorance and superstition held almost indisputable sway mutually rivalling each other in completing the degradation of the mass of the people”. In curing diseases divinations and incantations were more often resorted to than medicine which was a taboo if offered by a Christian. Barkar saw in January-1842 a Brahmin stirring some water, reading a holy book and occasionally blowing driving spirit and disease. In 1838 when the Sadiyakhwa died, it was believed that he was killed by *Dainis*. Interesting details are available in a journal of Brown, 22 October 1838, about the *Dainis* and *Bhutias* [ii, 19].

Again caste system had such a strong hold that even the poorest beggar will not receive charity if it did not conform to the doctrine of caste. The dying men would refuse medicine offered by a Christian lest he lose his caste. People refused to attend upon the sick or bury the dead who did not belong to the same caste. The Baptists felt that caste and opium were the curses in Assam. “Of the two”, Whiting remarks, “opium by far the most to be despised. An opium-eater now is not an exception, but one who does not eat it is an exception.” Without it, opium-eater would say, “his flesh would be squeezed with a thousand pincers, his throat would fill up, and it would seem he must die for want of breath.” They never failed to refer to the introduction of spirituous liquor into Assam and for this “no one was more responsible than those who bear the Christian name”. The government had, the Baptists alleged, encouraged consumption by licensing the sale and making that a source of revenue. Many of the higher classes of the natives who had abandoned Hindu faith, if not ostensibly, took to drinking and the use of liquor in general led to dissipation and ruin.

The Baptists arrived in Assam during the closing years of the Ahom monarchy when the leadership of the community was about to pass from the feudal nobility to the middle-class elite. They joined hands with celebrities like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hemchandra Barua, Gunaviram Barua not only in their relentless fight against the imposition of Bengali in courts and schools in Assam but also in eradicating the social evils in Assamese society. Remaining true to their faith the gentry had free and frank discussions with the Baptists on the new religion. Bronson was highly impressed with ex-*raja* Purandar Singha when in an interview the latter made many queries about Christianity. Kameswar Singha, then called a king, despite his drunkenness, was no less inquisitive about interpretations of astronomy and geography of the missionaries whom he requested to set up a school at Jorhat. He was very anxious to learn English as well as the sciences. What was most striking to the missionaries was that even at their decadent state members of the royal family maintained their earlier pomp and dignity. When in January 1853 Mrs Whiting was received in a royal state by the widow of Purandar Singha, she found her arrayed in a magnificent dress embroidered in gold, and was surrounded by a retinue of kneeling women. On the next morning Whiting found the young prince seated in a chair over which was thrown a richly embroidered cloth. A sword rested between his knee and a pipe was clenched firmly in his hand. He smoked continuously, seldom spoke. The conversation was carried on by the attendants. Whiting thought that the family was too proud and arrogant to be the subject of the Company.

While the ex-nobility and civil officers received them cordially, Brown writes, the priests and spiritual heads disputed and bitterly opposed the missionaries. The reasons were not far to seek—the latter condemned idolatry, caste and priesthood so dear to the Hindus whether the Saktists or the Vaisnavites. They lost no opportunity to preach through their sermons, books and tracts a crusade against Hinduism and all that it stood for and spoke eloquently of the virtues of the new faith. Every Hindu, they said, had a place of worship, a temple or a *Satra* presided over by a priest or gossain who read the *sastras* and superintended

the pujas. References were made of celebration of *Durga Puja*, *Rashjatra*, *Falgutsav* and also of occasional *nam* or *hobah* where the priest read the *sastras* and dough distributed unbaked with plantains. A *Satra* was formed, writes Barkar, by a large range of continuous houses in three sides of a square, the principal building occupying the centre. *Tamul* trees (betal-nut) thickly set were in rear of the houses covered with what is indispensable to any and every Assamese the *pan* leaf. To each *Satras* was attached a number of *Bhakats* or disciples ; of these the *kewalias* remained celibate and dedicated themselves to the services of God. "Some of the *Bhakats*", says Brown, "were so precise in their sense of cleanliness that they would wash all the wood they used in cooking rice and all the money they received so that they may not be polluted. On the same care they will not touch our books nor sit with our shadow falling upon them."

Bronson compared the *Satras* with Jewish Synagogues. These were daily visited by the disciples who came to worship the priest who was called a *mahunt* or *mahajan*. With their *Bhakats* the latter subsisted on offerings and yearly payments of the disciples. Collectors frequented annually distant villages where disciples lived, and if any one refused to pay he was at once denounced and made to suffer as an outcaste. The British had also done much to uphold, as in earlier times, the power of the priests by grant of rent-free lands and the people inferred that they were favoured so because they were worthy. On religious matters, therefore, they were considered to be the supreme authority who would attend to matters necessary for their salvation. The disciples called their priests *Prabhu* or God and were much more afraid to disregard their word than to disobey the command of God.

Mention is made in the journals of the principal *Satras* of Assam—Auniati, Dakhinpat, Kamalabari and Moamara. Auniati, Barkar wrote in 1842, commanded the allegiance of about two-thirds of the people and next in importance was Dakhinpat. Whenever the high priest of Auniati move, "it is in great state, with drums and trumpets blowing and numerous retinue attending him". The *Satradhikars* of Kamalabari and Moamara, in their view, were liberal in their outlook. We have in Bronson's

journal an interesting account of the Bordua Than. "There is a great attempt", he writes, "to show an increasing effort to obtain for it a celebrity, as a holy place, like that of Benaras and other places." Even the local magistrate lent support to it by requiring the witnesses to swear at the *Manikut* (temple) of the *than* to speak the truth.

While admitting a few Brahmins to be very respectful and appeared reasonable, they deplored, priestly classes in general manifested "a surprising bitterness towards the Gospel". If books were offered they regret with scorn declaring that they should be polluted by touch. They would say, "we are afraid to send our children (to school) lest being turned away from Hindu faith, they become Christian". "If Christianity is introduced into this country", Bronson declared, "it must be through the rising generation. It is as hard for grown up Assamese to alter his customs, as it is for the Ethiopian to change his skin, or the leopard to change his spot".

There may be a certain element of exaggeration in the allegations made by the missionaries against the Brahmins and priests. Admittedly, the exactions made by the spiritual heads on their disciples, as Bronson alleged, were greater than they could endure ; all the more when they were subjected to ever-increasing demands of the government.¹ It cannot also be denied that the influence of the gossains continued to be unbounded, and in case of failure of disciples to meet their multifarious demands, they were liable to be excommunicated. They failed to realise that, as elsewhere in the country, orthodoxy was the order of the day ; yet *kulinism*, sati rite and other disabilities of men and women were conspicuous by their absence in Assam. Professor Peck made a realistic assessment when he remarked : "Compared with Bengalis now...the Assamese, though devotees of the same faith and some of the most revolting forms, may be regarded as the more hopeful, inasmuch as idolatry with these is less inveterate and priestly power more lightly hold." In fact they were "then in a process of transition". Even in the forties Barkar wrote, "The days of priestly prosperity here have passed away,

1. Barpujari, H. K., *Political History of Assam* (ed.), 1976, pp., 88ff.

the days of their existence, even, are numbered and will soon be finished." The fortunes of the priestly classes hitherto depended on the patronage of the former government. For their support the rulers not only made large rent-free grants, but provided them with *pykes* or attendants. With the change in government some of the grants had been cancelled and at the same time *pykes* were emancipated : the wealth of the country gradually passed into the hands of the cultivators and traders and consequently the condition of the priestly classes had become deplorable. As Bronson writes : "they are now put on a footing with other subjects. Their influence and income are decreasing, their places of worship tumbling down, their slaves all liberated and dissension are springing up among them". The mission reports corroborate the statement made by Jenkins that the minor religious heads were losing their respect and influence mainly because of their internal feuds and litigation in the civil courts.¹ Bronson writes that two-thirds of the cases in the court of Nowgong had their origin, directly and indirectly, of the disgruntled gossains.

The American missionaries maintained that Mussalmans in Assam being by and large descendants of the converts to Islam belong to the same ethnical stock as the Hindus. In spite of their opposition to polytheism and idolatry, they corroborated to some extent the views of Shihabuddin Talish, that "Many of them hold the doctrine of Islam very loosely, or are very ignorant of what they are".² Danforth noticed in 1853 at Basgaon on the Barnadi followers of *Ratikhowas* of the Brahmins, Sudras, and Cacharis having feast at night of the forbidden food and spirituous drink of rice. The infiltration of the cult of Shri Chaitanya and particularly the Brahmos constituted a potential danger to the missionaries. The latter had its nucleus at Nowgong and elsewhere, and its adherents composed mostly of young Hindu elite on whom the Baptists counted most for their future. The tribesmen in the plains were generally demon-worshippers ; each had its own demon and ceremonies connected with it. Some of them, the Baptists recorded, embraced Hinduism by paying an annual

1. *Infra.*, p. 194n.

2. *Infra.*, p. 217n.

fee to the religious heads, and the latter too raised no objection to their taking pork and fowl which were otherwise taboos to their disciples.

The American Baptists were the pioneers in the ethnological studies in Assam. Besides a series of articles in the *Orunodoi* they published interesting accounts of their own of the Garos, Mikirs, Miris and Nagas with whom they lived and worked. Though sketchy, Revs Clark and Rivenburg have provided salient features of the government and racial characteristics of the AOs and the Angamis [ii, 71-2]. In his journal of 1843 Barkar records that the Nagas brought down in their *horas* (baskets) cotton, ginger, pepper, etc., to the Rajabahar *hat*, south of Jorhat, where they bartared for salt, pepper and pewter. Unlike the Nagas of Namsang they were not tattoed and were well-dressed; they wore cotton cloths of their own manufacture and dyed in dark blue. Bronson papers (pp. 231ff) shed interesting light on the Eastern Nagas. Jealous of "onward March" of the English they were alarmed at the sight of Bronson whom they suspected as a spy who had come on a reconnitering mission with the object of annexing their territory. Not to speak of the Angamis, who were intensely democratic, even the *Khunbao* or the chief of the Namsangias could not arrive at a major decision without concurrence of the Council of Elders. Clans were always at feud with one another; the young had to guard the village and fight with enemies while the women had to attend to household duties and manufacture of salt—the sole means of their subsistence. As soon as they reached manhood they put into their hands *dao* and spear and taught them how to fight and make salt. Security and economic reasons thus determined the day-to-day life of the Nagas. With their limited wants they loathed hard work and in any case as a porter or day labourer. Though "dirty and blood-thirsty", the missionaries spoke eloquently of the purity of life, truthfulness and hospitality of the Nagas.

Head-hunting and inter-tribal feuds were common to both the Nagas and the Garos. While taking of head was considered by some clans essential for the image of Naga manhood, the Garos felt it to be the religious duty to provide skulls of the enemies to grace the funeral ceremonies of the deceased. Relatives

of the Garos were bound by customs "to demand blood for blood, and ought to put to death either the murderer or one of his kindred or at least one of his slaves". The implacable hatred of the Garos towards the Bengalis had been traced by the missionaries to the extortion and oppression of the Bengali Zaminders who had hitherto jurisdiction over areas bordering the hills. In spite of their vindictiveness, they surpassed the plainsmen in honesty and truthfulness. By sacrifices and offerings they appeased heavenly bodies and the spirits of the hills, rivers and forests. Having features of the Indo-Chinese family these "short" but sturdy mountaineers depended on their livestock for their livelihood. They raised cotton which was bartared in the *hats* or markets in the plains. Interesting details are furnished of these *hats* in document ii 74

The Mikirs and the Miris were on the other hand peace-loving and law-abiding people. The former occupied by and large the hills in and on the border of the district of Nowgong while the latter on the bank of the rivers of Lakhimpur. Rev Joseph Paul refers that the Miris were the offshoot of the Bor-Abors which occupied the hills north-east of Lakhimpur. Inter-tribal feuds forced them to leave the hills and settle in their new habitat under protection of the British government. They lived in small villages consisting of a number of elevated *chang* houses with three to five families in each. Ethnically Mongolian and possessed of excellent physique, the Miris directed their energies in cultivating soil, hewing timbers and rowing boats. Miri women-folk were no less industrious ; from seed time to harvest they labour in field, weave cloths apart from attending to domestic chores. To the Miris stealing and lying were sins, but these simple and truthful people were opium-eaters and rice-beer addicts. Some of them had already come under the influence of Vaisnavite *gossains* and to earn their goodwill the latter had permitted them to indulge in prohibited food and drinks.

The Mikirs too possessed immense capacity for hard work, yet they could not produce their requirement of foodstuff ; not unoften they lived on roots, tender shoots of the bamboo and even certain grasses. They cultivated rice, cotton and raised silk-worms to make their garments. Like other animists they sought

to propitiate the demons and evil spirits who were supposed to have caused sickness and calamities. Subject to the British, they had an administrative system of their own under *Pinpo* or princes who were aided in deciding petty cases by officials known as *hubbais*. Every village had its headman who attended to the execution of the law rather than to the making of it.

X

“The stone is in motion” remarks Mrs Bronson in 1867 speaking of the impact of Christianity on the Assamese. Doubtless the thaw was breaking away. The impact of west and no less of Christianity, though slowly, replaced the blind faith on age-long customs and conventions by a spirit of enquiry and rationalism. Orthodoxy continued to be the order of the day, but its rigidity had gradually relaxed. Even in early fifties Maniram Dewan, an orthodox Hindu, deplored “by the reduction of all castes to the same level, the people are labouring under the deepest grief and mortification”.¹ Assamese pupils of the Brahmin families were seen studying with those of the low castes which was at one time considered highly objectionable. Learning English or going abroad were no longer considered social taboos. In their crusade against social evils—opium-eating², widowhood, polygamy—Assamese reformers were inspired to a great extent by the propagation of the American missionaries. The influence of the missionaries on the education of women was not small. Reluctance of the gentry to send their daughters to Christian schools compelled Mrs Barkar to depend on “Bazar girls”. Since sixties there was a growing desire among the educated Assamese that their daughters and wives should be taught. “Time has come”, remarks Stoddard, “we can reach them in their houses which we must do before we could gather them

1. Mills ; *Report on Assam*, 1854 ; Appendix K.B., also Barpujari, *Assam : In the Days of the Company*, 1980, p. 303.

2. The Baptists not only condemned the opium policy of the government but made repeated representation to abolish the sale of the drug except for medical purposes. *Third Triennial Conference*, p. 87 ; *Eighth Conference*, pp. 17-8,

to school".¹ Before long attempts had been made by the ladies of the mission to impart instructions to females of higher castes in *zenana* or private apartments as was done by the Women's Missionary Society in Calcutta.

Needless to say the American Baptists were the precursors of Assamese renaissance in language and literature *firstly* by opening the door to the west through their own writings and books published at the Mission Press, Sibsagar, and *secondly* by reinstating Assamese language in its rightful place in the schools and courts in Assam. It is doubtful whether the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal would have conceded to the demands of the Assamese in the teeth of opposition of the vested interests but for the strongest advocacy and protracted struggle carried on by the Baptists for over two decades. To the critics, Assamese Christian Literature being mostly translations were "lacking originality, artificial and even amusing for their perpetration of malapropism".² Despite earnest endeavours, it is true, the writers could not grasp the genius of the Assamese and in certain cases their writings betray foreign touches. Nonetheless the Baptists enriched Assamese literature by reintroducing words which were out of use and even coining simple and indigenous words. They brought out renaissance in Assamese literature both in style and content. The medieval outlook with emphasis on spiritual and supernatural themes were replaced by secular subjects and rational thinking and in its train came western literary forms—lyrics, sonnets, novel, short stories and biographies. The American missionaries "not only liberated the spirit of the Assamese from the bondage of the old world ideas of thought, but they also removed the confines of knowledge and made it quiet suitable for modern use".³

-
1. Writing in 1886 Miss Orell Keeler remarks, "Formerly we could only gain access to many of the higher castes by teaching some kind of needle-work. Now we are usually made welcome and can get a hearing, most opposition from higher castes, Brahmins and Mussalmans, though there." *Jubilee Papers*, p. 187.
 2. Baruah, B. K., *Modern Assamese Literature*, p. 5.
 3. Neog, D., *New Light on the History of Assamiya Literature*, pp. 360-1.

Opinions are also divided amongst scholars and anthropologists as to the impact of Christianity on the primitive tribes. Verrier Elwin remarks : "The activities of the Baptist missionaries among the Nagas have demoralised the people, destroyed tribal solidarity and forbidden the joys and feasting, the decorations and romance of communal life."¹ J. H. Hutton also deplores : "old beliefs and customs are dying, the old traditions are being forgotten, the number of Christian or quasi-Christians is steadily increasing, and the spirit of change is invading and pervading every aspect of village life."² While appreciating the educational and humanitarian activities of the mission, Haimendorf observes : "That with a little more understanding and sympathy for the Naga culture they might have brought more happiness to their folk and avoided many of the more unfortunate results of a sudden clash of cultures."³ D. R. Mankekar on the other hand believes that "they have been Christians for hardly four generations and therefore psychologically, temperamentally and environmentally they have not changed much".⁴ In a similar strain Downs argues : "Many elements in the traditional life on the surface of it seem to have been abandoned by the Christians in fact appeared in different guise under the new order."⁵

There can be no rebuttal that the missionaries forbade the Nagas not only raiding and head-hunting, but drinking wine (*madhu*) and celebrating ancient rites and ceremonies (*genma*, feasts of merit) which were part and parcel of the life of the community. Likewise Christian Garos discarded earlier practices of propitiating by sacrifices the spirits and demons in hills besides replacing traditional music for Christian hymns, folk community dance for Western dance and sacrifices for foreign medicines.

-
1. Elwin, Verrier, *The Aborigines*, Oxford Pamphlet on Indian Affairs ; Cited in Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, p. 120.
 2. Hutton, J. H., *Angami Nagas*, 1921, pp. vii-viii.
 3. Haimendorf, C. V. F., *The Naked Nagas*, 1962, pp. 56-7, "Social and Cultural Change among the Konyak Nagas", *Highlander*, i, 1973, pp. 3ff.
 4. Mankekar, D. R., "Understanding The Tribals on our North-Eastern Border" ; Singh, S., *Tribal Situation in India*, 1972, p. 113.
 5. Downs, F. S., *Christianity in North-East India*, p. 216.

J. P. Mills is certainly in the right when he says¹ : "By putting a stop to head-hunting the British government has profoundly changed the mode of life of all the tribes in the administered area." This was "the very core of the Naga culture based upon the concept of fertility...The stone walls and palisades, village gates majestically decorated with human heads, feasts of merit flamboyant head-dress, elaborate textiles with patterns of symbolic of head-hunting are intimately bound up with this basic activity".² The introduction of an all powerful alien rule, development in communication, money-economy and material benefits made the changes inevitable. Profound was also the influence of evangelisation on the life and thought of the tribesmen. The Baptists established churches, started schools and opened hospitals. They taught the warring communities the value of peace, toleration and peaceful coexistence. The process of acculturation was accelerated by the spread of the gospel, expansion of education, introduction of Roman script, translation and publication of the Bible and literary works. Christian ideas of brotherhood and Western education widened their mental horizon and pushed them, in the words of an eminent Naga scholar, "out of the thought of seclusion and isolation from which they were suffering for ages into open ideals and civilization of the people of the world".³

"Backed and protected by the British administration", D. R. Mankekar remarks,⁴ "these missionaries converted the tribes to Christianity in large numbers and reclaimed them to civilisation and in the process, raised yet another wall (between the hill tribes and the plainsmen) cultural and religious." It is true, Hinduisation did not infiltrate into inaccessible hills, yet there had been frequent contacts between the peoples of the two regions. In fact for ages past the fortunes of the two were inextricably interwoven. For their forbearance and good behaviour hitherto the

1. Mills, J. P., *AO Naga Tribes of Assam*, 1925, p. 104.

2. Haldipur, R. N., "Policy Towards and Administration of the Tribes of North-East India", Singh *op. cit.*, p. 307.

3. Asoso Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas*, 1974, p. 120.

4. Mankekar, D. R., *op. cit.*, p. iii ; Goswami, B. B., "The Tribes of Assam : A Few Comments, etc." ; Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

Assam rulers granted the hill-chiefs certain rights in the plains to provide them with their requirements of foodstuff and other necessities. The hills were always open to the plainsmen while the hillmen not only frequented but many had their settlements in the plains. Assamese was the language of their communication and even amongst the tribes of diverse dialects. The intercourse between the two peoples naturally tended to a process of assimilation and in any case at border areas. Sources archival and indigenous bear testimony to the fact that the Assamese gossains or religious heads succeeded in initiating some of the Eastern Nagas and at times even in mediating in their inter-tribal feuds. In case the process continued unabated, it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, on the part of the American missionaries to make much headway in these hills. Instead of carrying on their activities with redoubled vigour at a time that was greatly needed, the religious heads frittered away their energies in domestic quarrels and thereby paved the way for the success of the missions. Backed by the Christian rulers the missionaries provided the hillmen all they needed—educational, spiritual and material. With their extraordinary power of adaptability they succeeded in winning the hearts of tribesmen, as Alemchiba AO explains, “by medical work, by missionary propaganda, by display of culture somehow regarded as higher, by objects of trade (*and*) by administration.”¹ The growing attachment to the newcomers was followed by a corresponding indifference to their neighbour below which was accentuated in no less degree by the *Inner Line Regulations* (1873). Western education and thought roused the tribesmen from their torpor to assert their rights : political, economic and cultural. There is already “a search for a sense of identity, for a sense of belonging and for self-determination in a new social order” borne out of an apprehension, as explained by Nihar-
ranjan Ray, “that being drawn into the mainstream of contemporary Indian life would mean their complete absorption by the larger and more dominant society of which by far the largest in number are Hindus”.² This search for distinct identity inevitably

1. Alemchiba, M. AO, “Problems of Readjustment to a New Situation”, Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

79. Ray Nihar-
ranjan, “Introductory Lecture” ; Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-3.

opened the breach between the peoples of the hills and the plains into an yawning gulf in recent times.

Again there has been much uproar against the missionaries that they were mainly instrumental in fomenting political unrest amongst the hillmen of North-East India.¹ "The missionaries did very good work," observes Prime Minister Nehru, "and I have all priase for them, but politically speaking, they did not particularly like the changes in India. In fact, just when a new political awareness dawned on India, there was a movement in North-Eastern India to encourage the people of the North-East India to form separate and independent States. Many foreigners (missionaries) resident in the area supported this movement."² True, the missionaries converted animist tribes into Christianity and brought them into contact with the Western thought through English education ; but there is hardly any evidence, barring perhaps a few individual cases, that the missionaries ever made any organised move to set up an independent State or instigated the tribesmen to unfurl the standard of revolt against the Indian government. In fact political unrest or separatist tendencies of some of these tribes was the endeavour on their part for the assertion of separate identity, political and cultural, following British pull out of India.³ They were inspired in no less extent by the insurrectionary movements

-
1. Assam Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi had said on December 2, 1953, "I cannot think of any demand for Independent Sovereign Naga State raised by a few handful of leaders, mostly Christians. And probably this demand was raised by interested foreign missionaries to keep them isolated from the rest of India." Alemchiba, M. AO, *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*, p. 75.
 2. The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India ; *The Adivasis*, 1955, p. 4.
 3. "From a structural analysis", observes B. K. Roy Burman, "It is immaterial whether certain agencies like foreign missionaries... have been involved in the posture of defiance on the part of small communities concerned. Even if these agencies were not there, more or similar developments would have taken place. It is significant to note that in Burma, one of the most important ethnic group defying the authority of Central Government is the Shans who were Buddhists of the same denomination as the other Burman." "Integrated Area Approach to the Problems of the Hill Tribes of North-East India," Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3.

beyond the borders—Burma, Malaya or Indonesia in the wake of Japanese invasions.¹

The cross followed the British flag ; the case was, however, otherwise in North-Eastern India. Here the early missionaries had been invited for reasons of their own by the local authorities. The foreign missionaries were also well aware that they could not carry on their operations without the protection and support of the established government. In spite of occasional dispute and differences, therefore, they remained steadfastly loyal to the British and later to Indian government. In their evangelisation, doubtless, at times they denounced rituals and religions of the non-Christians, but a perusal of the mission papers in original, particularly of the American Baptists, would reveal that they hardly acted in a manner as would embarrass the government.² There is a tendency even at highly responsible quarters to condemn the British or their agents whatever they did in India. An unbiased and impartial observer cannot but admit that these missionaries were the only foreigners who landed in India with no other motive than the spread of the gospel. It would be highly ungenerous—nay an act of ingratitude to start a campaign of vilification against that very agency which rendered yeoman service in regenerating the Assamese at a crucial period apart from redeeming the primitive tribes from their utter backwardness.

1. See Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes, North-East Frontier*, iii, pp. 335-6.

2. The American Consul-General was placed in an embarrassing situation in 1921 when some missionaries not only met Gandhiji in his arrival at Jorhat, but attended his public meeting at the *maidan*. "We are sitting on a magazine", remarks Rev, A. J. Tuttle, "I hope all of us do all in our power to counteract the effect of our seeming sympathy with those who are working against the government." (*ABFMS*, Tuttle, August 30, and September 10, 1921). On the other hand when the Congress accepted office in 1938, the Foreign Secretary advised the head of the missions not to adopt a hard and fast policy as would make it difficult for the Christian representatives to discharge their duties in the Assembly or in office. "The need for a Christian impact in government is so...important that we (should not) set them apart as a class distinct from their fellow citizens." (*Ibid.*, Foreign Secretary, September 10, 1941).