Chapter X
Summary and Conclusion

In the foregoing pages a study has been made to make an assessment of the contribution of the American Baptist Missionaries in the nineteenth century social transformation of Assam in the specific fields of culture and art.

Assam was annexed to the British regime following the treaty of Yandaboo between the British East India Company and the kingdom of Burma on February 24, 1826. The condition of Assam at that time was precarious in all spheres of life - political, economical, social and cultural. The society had been crushed to the earth after the Burmese war. Assamese people had fled to hilly areas such as Jayantia for security. Even after annexation, the Khamtis in upper Assam did not accept their fate and disturbances occurred from time to time. It was Mr. Francis Jenkins, the British Commissioner in Assam, who invited the American Baptist Missionaries to Assam, with the hope of spreading education and Christianity for the facility of the British administration. In response to his direct invitation to the American Baptist Missionary Board in America, Rev. Nathan Brown and Rev. Oliver T. Cutter arrived Sadiya with their families on March 23, 1836. As a reinforcement to this original mission, Rev. Miles Bronson and Rev. Jacob Thomas and their wives started for Sadiya. Rev. Thomas lost his life in an accident while traveling in a country boat on the Brahmaputra river. Finally Mr. and Mrs. Bronson and Mrs. Thomas arrived Sadiya on July 17, 1837.
In the same year that the American Baptist Missionaries entered Assam, the Assamese language was replaced by Bengali in the schools and courts of Assam by the British administration. The noted linguists, Dr. Nathan Brown and Dr. Miles Bronson, fought for the cause of re-instatement of the Assamese language and were finally successful. The British Government reintroduced the Assamese language in the courts and schools of Assam. The challenging role of championing the cause of the Assamese language at a most critical period of its history, and in ushering in the modern era in Assamese literature is known to all educated Assamese.

I am aware that my research topic is based on socio-cultural contributions of the Baptist Missionaries in Assam, in the nineteenth century, with a look into the cultural and artistic dimensions in particular. I tried to collect pertinent research materials from all available sources in Assam and America.

The entire research work has been categorized into ten chapters.

The first chapter is an introduction. The first part contains objective and scope of work. In the second part, I give a back drop of Assam and its socio-cultural milieu in the nineteenth century, till the advent of the American Baptist Missionaries.

In the second chapter, I discuss the advent of the American Baptist Missionaries into Assam.

In the third chapter, the effect of Christian proselytization in Assam and the effect of the philanthropic activities on the contemporary socio-cultural milieu are discussed. The dangerous opium eating habit of Assamese and hills people, and the fight by the American Baptist Missionary for the eradication of this habit are
discussed. The effect of adoption of a new life with new code of conduct, the beliefs and dilemma of traditional cultures are focused. The opening of schools for general education, endeavour of the Missionaries for female education along with other philanthropic works of the Missionaries are discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the focus is on the rehabilitation of the Assamese language in Assam. Rev. Miles Bronson took a leading role on the subject, and worked as a team with Anandaram Dhekial Phukan and other Assamese. This was a direct confrontation of the American Baptist Missionaries with the British people for the justice of the Assamese people.

The fifth chapter has been devoted to the miscellaneous activities of the American Baptist Missionaries. The focus is made how the Missionaries made new approaches on the subjects - Assamese journalism, collection and publication of old manuscripts, textual criticism, numismatics, ethnography, folk lore, and material culture as subject of studies.

In the sixth chapter, I discuss how Assamese literature entered into the modern era and the contribution of the Missionaries. The various phases of Assamese language and literature have been broadly categorized in terms of five eras - the ancient era, the pre-Vaishnava era, the Vaishnava era, the post-Vaishnava era and the modern era. Each era has been discussed briefly. Under the modern era, the time frame between 1836 to 1870 has been described as period of the Missionary literature. The contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries in literary field are mentioned. The
historical role played by the *Orunodoi* in the development of the modern Assamese has been identified.

In chapter seven, new book production techniques and the use of new formats are discussed. The development of printing technology and fonts used in the Baptist Missionary Press at Sibsagar for Assamese literature are discussed. The Baptist Missionaries introduction of the concept of contents and use of an indexing system in Assamese writing are discussed.

In chapter eight, the new trends in performing and visual arts as well as objects of material culture are discussed. Contributions of the Baptist Missionaries in music, graphic arts, architecture and theatre are discussed. Under music, a few original Christian English songs have been documented with their original western notations. The corresponding translation of these songs into Assamese which were made by Rev. Nathan Brown, Rev. Miles Bronson, and Nidhi Levi Farwell are reproduced. A few Christian songs in local traditional tunes were collected from Assam and those are reproduced in this chapter with their western notations. A few Christian songs composed as *Munda* songs, *Sadana* songs, *Bodo* songs, *Saora* songs, *Mikir* songs, *Dafala* songs, *Apatani* songs, *Miri* songs, and *Nepali* songs are added, which shows the interest of the Missionaries in the other local languages and tunes in addition to Assamese for enhancing popularity of Christian hymns. The graphic arts published in the *Orunodoi* using the technique of wood block relief printing are documented. The concept of western architecture which had been carried by the Missionaries from the west, was applied in construction of Church buildings in Assam.
In chapter nine, the seeds sown by the missionaries for the growth of Assamese cultural resurgence are discussed.

While searching for materials for my research work I could not find any published materials which fit directly to my research area. To my knowledge, not many people or other researchers have published any literature on this research subject. I believe, this dissertation will throw some light in the contribution of the Baptist Missionaries in the areas of cultural and artistic dimensions of Assam.

While performing this research work which focused on the geographical boundary of present day Assam, I realized that the scope is available to perform research of a similar nature using the hills areas of North East India as boundary.

Another possible research subject could be an exhaustive study of the usage of contents, indexing, punctuations and syntax in the Assamese writings of the American Baptist Missionaries. A compilation of available Christian devotional songs in all the languages of North East India along with their notations of local tunes could also be a subject of investigation.

There is no doubt that the Baptist Missionaries performed a lot of commendable services for the Assamese. But in some instances we observe that they may have followed the instruction of the British, or that the Missionaries did not execute any plan which the British would not support, with only a few exceptions. We do not see any direct role of the Missionaries in the cause of freedom for the people of Assam. The Missionaries did not even focus on the death of the martyr Maniram Dewan, who was hung by the British administration for his revolt against the British.
In words of F. S. Downs - 'The missionaries did not see their primary purpose as being agents of the colonial powers; their primary purpose was the propagation of the Gospel. What can be said is that while each Christian missions and Government were there for their own purposes, each found the other useful' (Downs 1983 : 50-51).

It is true that the British maintained a divide and rule policy between the hills people and the plains people. The British tried to isolate and alienate the hills men from their plains neighbour. The Missionaries were successful in the hills areas, converting more people into Christianity than in the plains areas. No doubt, they made thousands of hills people literate, but in the process, they disturbed the traditional cultures of the hill people and reinforced the traditional animosity between the hills people and plains people.

A few present writers focus on the hidden intentions of the American Baptist Missionaries and their close relations with the British. Some writers praised the British people in the Orunodoi excessively. From the following reports that the Missionaries sent to the Home Board in America, we can better understand their hidden intentions and why the Missionaries continued to publish the Orunodoi, although it incurred a continuous loss.

Report : 'Mission to Assam', Thirty-first Report, July 1845, Asiatic Missions :

----A part of the last summer was spent in the preparation of a course of lectures against Hinduism, to be delivered the ensuing cold season in the larger villages. ----

Report : 'Mission to Assam', May 1847 :

----The labor at this station has rested heavily on Mr. Cutter; including for several months the editing and publication of the Orunodoi, or "Rising Dawn,"
a monthly periodical of a religious and miscellaneous character, commenced in January, 1846, and designed for circulation among the native population. Such a paper, it was thought, would exert a greater influence than tracts, if the people would subscribe for it, a condition most happily realized. ----

Report: 'Assam Mission’ May, 1862, Forty-eighth Annual Meeting:

----The Orunodoi has an increasing circulation, and seems to awaken growing interest in the native mind. By this paper, we reach the hundreds of readers who cannot be reached by any other means, and who, if we attempted to preach to them, - which we have not the means to do at present, - would not hear. But here we mix in the knowledge of gospel truth along with news and matter which they are becoming eager for, and thus, all unawares to themselves, their modes of thought are undergoing a gradual but certain change.----

Report: 'Assam Mission’ May, 1864:

----The Orunodoi has been kept up and its circulation increased, though it still falls short of paying its own expenses. One influential Hindu native, residing in Nowgong, has just sent me about one hundred and fifty names of new subscribers, nearly the whole paying in advance. Many tea planters take a number of copies to circulate among the natives in their employ. The paper cannot fail to be a powerful instrument in changing the modes of thought of the native mind and diffusing information among this very ignorant people.----

Report: ‘Assam Mission’ May, 1865:

---- It is believed to be doing a great deal of good in a general way throughout the province. If it were dropped, some native paper would be started, and, to judge from those in Bengal, it would mislead rather than improve the native mind.----

Report: 'Mission to the Assamese’ May, 1868: (Mr. Ward states:)

---- I do not feel willing to risk the consequences of raising the price of the paper, though it does not pay, for fear the great object in view will be defeated. The great aim is to have it read as widely as possible, and we can trust for its usefulness to the great law of influence, which works its own slow but sure results. Nothing that we issue at the Mission press is read so widely, and a large class can be influenced at present by nothing else.

---- We have made a special effort to interpret to the people this high death rate, and especially the "Kala-Azar," as a visitation from God on account of their sins. We have observed some indications that the people are thinking seriously along this line. We pray especially that God will, through His Spirit, convict them in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

No matter how we examine the benevolence of the American Baptist Missionaries activities, there are some basic truths associated with their actions. A truth is always a truth. The Baptist Missionaries proceeded from America to Assam, a journey of not less than ten thousand miles, knowing the hazard and perils of the journey. They traveled mostly by country boats on rivers and by walking hundreds and hundreds of miles. Some times they used elephants for local trips. Life-threatening diseases surrounded them. The early missionary families who went to Assam, lost their dear ones - some were young children and some were adults. No one in America forced them to go to such a remote and undeveloped area. There must have been a driving force associated with their long journey, and this force was the willingness to do some good work for mankind by spreading Christianity. Their hearts were great, and their minds were full of hope. It is true that the inspiration was from their Christian religion. But keeping religion aside, we must acknowledge the greatness of the people in their objective of serving mankind.

The following expressions tell us about the dedication of the Missionaries and how deeply they loved their foreign country.

Report: ‘Mission to Assamese’ May, 1868 : (Mr. Stoddard wrote : )

Gowahati is indeed a place of universal beauty, and picturesque in the highest degree. I cannot now name a place on the wonderful Hudson that can surpass it in natural scenery.

(Mrs. Ward states:)

I have the gratifying privilege of returning my salary for the past fourteen
months, since Dr. Ward's death, to the Mission treasury. I commenced the
year with the intention of drawing only what I might find necessary to my
needs; and as the meal in the barrel and the cruse of oil, have not failed, I can
praise God for the privilege of having given myself with earnest diligence to
mission-work without remuneration.

In a letter after returning from America Mrs. Bronson wrote - 'Oh, this
delightful November weather! ---- I really think there is no more lovely spot on earth
than dear, quiet Nowgong' (Gun 1911: 138).

With sad and reluctant heart, Dr. Bronson's parting words at his farewell at the
river station in 1878: "I do not want to go, my heart is here. I desire, above all things
to live and labor for Christ here." Turning to a native Kohl preacher with us and
placing his hand on his shoulder, he said, "Preach Christ, live Christ. A great
responsibility rests on the native Christians. Be true, be faithful, my brother, and may
God bless you." (Gurney 1887: 254-255).

Rev. S. M. Whiting states: "I am satisfied in the thought that Assam is my
home, and my home for life" (Gurney 1887: 247).

The bridge constructed between the American Baptist Missionaries and the
Assamese people in the nineteenth century still exists. On November 4, 1983, a large
group of Assamese residents of America and members of the American Baptist Church
celebrated the 100th Anniversary Convocation in honour of Dr. Miles Bronson at the
Andover Newton Theological School, Newton, Massachusetts. The convocation
president, Mr. George Peck who was a missionary in Assam, welcomed the guests first
in fluent Assamese and then in English. In his address president Peck remarked:

“If we look with an opened mind at the missionary movement of the past one hundred and seventy-five years, especially at its nineteenth-century segment, I believe we shall marvel that in the providence of God, so striking a train of scholar-saints was raised up to give it leadership and in that company of scholar-saints the Bronsons are to be numbered.” Recalling Bronson and other scholar-saints like Judson and Nathan Brown, President Peck said, “These were people noted not only for their dedication and conviction but also for their capacity for cultural identification, their capacity for human empathy and for their ability to get inside of a community and a civilization and to become one with it. So that today in retrospect, they are famous not only as evangelists and church builders, themselves noble tasks, but also as persons who contributed profoundly to the language and culture of the folk among whom they labored” (Datta: 1985).

No doubt, the American Baptist Missionaries came to Assam only with the objective of propagation of Christianity. We find a combination of both negative and positive aspects in their attitude towards the indigenous people and culture of Assam having justifications from their missionary point of view. It is significant that under the circumstances, the people of Assam got benefitted by the ‘positive’ acts of the Missionaries and in the process were indirectly gained a lot in terms of new and modern dimensions in so many fields.

In the final analysis we can make an objective assessment of the role of the American Baptist Missionaries in the following manner:

No doubt that the Missionaries worked for the transformation of the Assamese society particularly in the rehabilitation of Assamese language and in ushering in new ideas. But the fact remains that the Missionaries came to Assam as evangelists.
Through their philanthropic works they were successful in winning the hearts of Assamese people. But this was not the only objective. On the other hand, the Missionaries had a firm belief that the Christianity is superior to Hinduism. At the same time the Missionaries did not comment against Hinduism in all respects. The Missionaries contributed significantly in the fields of education, health, modern concept of language and literature, printing technology etc. and initiated a pioneering role, but they were not the only ones in pioneering the objectives.

The Missionaries had their individual genuine love for Assam. But, it is also true that they had a passive understanding with the British administration and an inert superiority feeling for their religion and culture. The Missionaries were not free from notions of racial and cultural superiority of western society.

In balance, it must be admitted that the positive points of the contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries outbalanced the negative ones and also that the feelings of attachment and gratitude of the Assamese community towards the Baptist Missionaries are not wholly misplaced.