Chapter I

Introductory

A. Objective and Scope of the work

B. Assam and its Socio-Cultural Milieu: A Historical Overview till the Advent of the American Baptist Missionaries

A. Objective and scope of the work

The Assamese people have a very close attachment for the American Baptist Missionaries who worked in Assam in the nineteenth century. The contribution of the Baptist Missionaries in the rehabilitation of Assamese literature is always in the hearts of Assamese people, which leads to an emotional attachment towards the Baptist Missionaries. The subject is now a part of textbooks of Assamese language, literature and culture. The subject is even an integral part of Assamese history. The Missionaries also did evangelistic works in other parts of India, but we do not see such unique emotional attachment in those parts of India as that which exists in the minds of the Assamese people towards the Baptist Missionaries. Even in the present day the Baptist Missionaries are well received by the Assamese society as their benefactors. So far, quite an extensive study has been made of the contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries in the field of Assamese language and literature. Substantial numbers of textbooks and articles backed by original research work have been published on the subject by reputed scholars of Assam. The books written by Dr. Maheswar Neog, Dr. Herambakanta Barpujari, Mr. Dimbeswar Neog, Dr. Jogendra Narayan
Bhuyan, and Dr. Banikanta Sarma on the subject are noteworthy. The academic research work for the Ph.D. degree by Dr. Banikanta Sarma on the topic - ‘Contribution of the Christian Missionaries to the growth and development of Assamese language and literature during the 19th century’ (Gauhati University, 1980, unpublished dissertation), and by Dr. Satish C. Bhattacharyya on the topic - ‘Assamese society and culture as depicted in the literature of the Orunodoi period’ (Gauhati University, 1993, unpublished dissertation) are of extensive information. The articles written by Dr. Nagen Saikia, Dr. Kabin Phukan and Mr. Prasenjit Chowdhury throw light on the subject with critical analysis.

From the religious point of view, the memory of the Baptist Missionaries is still cherished by the Christian people, particularly by the Christians of the hill areas of north-east India. The contribution of the Baptist Christian Churches has been very vital. Extensive studies of Church histories from the Christian point of view have also been made by Christians and non-Christians. A substantial number of books have been published by the reputed scholar Dr. Frederick S. Downs on the subject. The work of Victor Hugo Sword is also noteworthy. In addition, we find a lot of articles written by other eminent Christian writers in the journals of Christianity.

I have read the works of both Christian and non-Christian writers. I feel that most of the Assamese writers are emotionally influenced by the dedicated service of the American Baptist Missionaries towards the rehabilitation of the Assamese language. A notion seems to be working in some of those writings as if the Missionaries went to Assam with the missionary goal of uplifting Assamese language and literature. Such writings focus on the literary contributions and
benevolent works of the Missionaries on center stage and do not pay enough attention to the goal of Christian proselytization of the Baptist Missionaries. On the other hand, the Christians in the hills emphasize the Christian gospel and Church activities without paying proper attention to the other important activities of the Missionaries. I feel that there are other aspects of the contribution of the Missionaries, such as their activities in the fields of socio-cultural upliftment and their academic works in such areas as ethnography, numismatics, material culture and artistic aspects in particular, which have not been placed in the right perspective. I feel that those activities of the Missionaries should get proper exposure, and I have tried to make a neutral assessment in my research work, allowing due importance to the positions taken by both the sets of writers. It was in my mind that a balanced study was needed, which will reveal a true picture of the contribution of the Missionaries in Assam.

Someone might ask me why I have chosen this topic for my research work. I must say that since I live in the USA I am in an advantageous position to collect information and data from various sources in the USA compared to others in Assam. Since I came to the USA, I became more concerned about my roots in Assam. While I studied the history of Assamese language and literature, I could see in more detail the involvement of American Baptist Missionaries in giving a new dimension to Assamese literature. I was born and brought up in an atmosphere of traditional culture of Assam. I have an acquaintance with both the traditional and modern age of Assam. I am from Jorhat, where the Missionaries maintained their educational, religious and medical institutions. Perhaps the existence of these institutions in my home town alerted me to think about the
contribution of Missionaries. Living in America when I came to know the past of
the Missionaries, I realized that so many things from America are connected with
Assam. Even at the present time the contribution of the Missionaries is a matter of
live discussion among Assamese, and is really a living present. I was excited to see
and explore first hand information such as the Haystack Monument. I felt a strong
tie between Assam and America. I tried to delve deeper into the subject of the
contribution of Missionaries in Assam. This was the homeland of those foreign
Missionaries, the place where they went to during their service period in Assam.
This was the place where the Missionaries sent correspondence to their home
office from Assam. This was the place to which they made long voyages on the
sea. Excitement and curiosity led me to locate the sources where the original old
documents, reports, books and journals could be found. I took off time from my
occupation and made trips to the places with a hope to collect some authentic
information which might not have been turned up by others or might have been
inadequately explored. Yes, I could gather some first hand information, such as
the Haystack Monument, which are related to my research work and which are
only available in America. Another advantageous position I had was the ability to
meet with the knowledgeable people in America who worked actively in the
missionary field in Assam. In America I met Dr. F. S. Downs at his residence at
Cape Cod, Massachusetts. His suggestions were very valuable to me. It was my
pleasure to meet his father Dr. E. S. Downs, a medical doctor presently at 96 years
of age. Dr. E. S. Downs was at Tura as an American missionary for forty years.
Recollecting the past, he also added his views on my research topic. Rev. George
Gillespie of Moorestown, New Jersey guided me in locating the available
information, and helped by loaning me some of his own collection of materials. I have met all the notable writers of Assam who made studies in the field of the American Baptist Missionaries in Assam. I met with Dr. H. K. Barpujari at his residence in Guwahati and at Boston during his visit to USA. I met Dr. Nagen Saikia, Dr. Kabin Phukan and Mr. Prasenjit Chowdhury at Dibrugarh, Dr. Jogendra Narayan Bhuyan at Nagaon, Dr. Banikanta Sarma at Guwahati and Dr. Satish Bhattacharjee at Tezpur. Of course I discussed my topic with my advisor Dr. Birendranath Datta during my visits to Assam, and also by letters and telephone from the USA. All these gave me the insight and encouragement to pursue this research topic.

I made a trip to Eaton Rapid, Michigan where Rev. Miles Bronson had been living, upon his return from Assam. I took photographs of his tomb and epitaph located at Rosehill Cemetery. This gives us an authentic documentation of his date of birth and death. I made similar documentation for his wife Marry Donnelly Rankin. I also visited Maranatha Bible Chapel ground, located at East Charlemont, Massachusetts, and took photographs of the tomb and epitaph of Rev. Nathan Brown for documentation. I was surprised when I observed that a portion of the epitaph was written in the Assamese language. I also documented the records of birth and death of Eliza Whitney Ballard, the wife of Rev Nathan Brown, and also of their children who died in Maulmain, Sadiya and Jaipur. The photographs of tombs and epitaphs of Rev. Nathan Brown and Rev. Miles Bronson are reproduced in this dissertation.

During my visit to Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts, I took photographs of the Haystack Monument from where the Foreign Missionary work
started in America in 1806. A significant number of valuable old documents and books relating to Assam are preserved in the archive section of the Williams College library. The books contain history of Assam, old documents, contemporary literature of the British and the Missionary era, Assamese literature both secular and religious, socio-cultural matters including ethnology, folklore and other items. I found some books that had been written in Assamese by the American Missionaries during nineteenth century in the archives of the Boston public library. These books are of both a secular and non secular type, and were published from Sibsagor Mission Press and Serampore Mission Press. The cover pages of some of the books are added in the appendix of this dissertation. In the archive section of the library of Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Center, Massachusetts, the original and microfilm of Bronson Papers are available. These Bronson Papers are really a treasure to learn of the actual expressions of Rev. Miles Bronson on so many important issues of Baptist Missionaries of Assam in the nineteenth century. In addition, valuable information on nineteenth century Assam could be extracted from these papers. In the archive section of the Foreign Mission of Historical Society of the American Baptist Missionaries, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, I could study the original annual reports made by the Baptist Missionaries to the Home Board in America. These reports contain lot of valuable information about missionary activities in Assam from its inception to the end of the mission period. In addition, the library has a good collection of books on nineteenth century Assam on all diversified matters. Some books written by the Missionaries based on their real experiences are very vivid and interesting. From these books we can draw a picture of socio-cultural and socio-economic life of the
entire area of north east India. One may gather a substantial amount of
information on the traditional cultures of different tribal and non tribal peoples of
the entire north east India of nineteenth century. In addition to the valuable books
on Christianity and Assam Mission, the archive section of the Library of the
Society of the American Baptist Missionaries, Rochester, New York, is preserving
a substantial number of old Assamese books on Assamese literature. I made a
Xerox copy of the rare Assamese book - 'A few Remarks on the Assamese
Language, and on Vernacular Education of Assam' by a Native (1855). Rev.
George Gillespie, who was a missionary in Assam for eighteen years donated a
valuable collection relating to the activities of the Baptist Missionaries in Assam to
this library. Rev. Gillespie guided me as to where to find my related materials and
how. At the American Baptist Missionaries' Rochester Library, I found some
Assamese Christian songs with their western notations. Some Christian songs
recorded on gramophone records are also preserved. A part of the Rev.
Gillespie's collection are kept in the archive section of the library of the Princeton
Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey. This collection also contains rare
books on Assamese literature, and books on traditional cultures of all the ethnic
tribal people of north east India, including works of Verrier Elwin. In the New
York Public Library I got a few valuable books related to my research topic
written by Dr. Maheswar Neog and Dr. Nagen Saikia, in addition to books written
by western writers.

I am aware that the scholars Dr. H. K. Barpujari and Dr. F. S. Downs in
addition to a few others, made visits to the above mentioned archive libraries and
included the findings in their published books as appropriate documents or references. Dr. H. K. Barpujari and Dr. F. S. Downs have made considerable contributions in diversified aspects of the contributions of American Baptist Missionaries in Assam. The notable books in this respect by Dr. Barpujari are: *The American Missionaries and North East India (1836-1900 AD)*, *Christian Missionary Sakal aru Unbingsha Shatikar Asom*, and *Asomor Nava Jagaron - Ana Asomiar Bhumika*. Dr. Downs wrote the following valuable books: *The Mighty Works of God, Christianity in North East India; History of Christianity in India* Vol. V, Part 5; *Essays on Christianity in North East India* and *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women in North East India*. However, I have not found any book which directly relates to my specific research topic which is the contribution of the American Baptist Missionaries in the socio-cultural and artistic perspectives. It appears to me that the contribution of the Baptist Missionaries in these aspects were not fully focused on by any previous writer. I have tried to put my findings appropriately in the different chapters of this dissertation.

**Scheme of work and Methodology:**

I have studied all available literary publications which are directly or indirectly related to my research topic. I have collected materials from those writings and have made use of them in my dissertation.

From time to time I have made trips to Assam to collect materials and to meet with and interview knowledgeable people who have made studies on the
missionary works in Assam. I have visited places where the Baptist missionaries had or have centers of missionary activities in Assam where the materials for my study are available. The places include Guwahati, Jorhat, Nagaon, Sibsagar, Golaghat and Shillong.

I have taken extensive photographs to document facts both in Assam and in the USA. Some of the photographs are used appropriately here to compare or to show intermingled or diffused phenomena of a cultural or architectural aspect. I used audio equipment to record the tunes of Assamese Christian songs. I also gathered information from different available sources by correspondence.

B. Assam and its Socio-Cultural Milieu:

A historical Overview till the Advent of the American Baptist Missionaries

Since I will be focusing on the socio-cultural and artistic contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries in the nineteenth century Assam, I would like to give a backdrop of nineteenth century Assam, its people and their socio-cultural life. This will give us a proper perspective for undertaking a proper assessment of the contribution of the American Baptist Missionaries.

The Baptist Missionaries came to Assam during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The concept of nineteenth century Assam is related to a historical development in Assam. The geographical boundaries of Assam at the time of the advent of the American Baptist Missionaries were quite different from
those of present-day Assam. Assam at one time included the bulk of the areas of present seven-sister states: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal. However, I will be limiting my research work mostly to the geographical boundaries of present-day Assam. Although some works were planned or started by the American Baptist Missionaries in the latter part of nineteenth century, effective missions became a reality only in the early part of the twentieth century. Their philanthropic activities will be focused primarily in the areas of the Brahmaputra valley.

Assam in ancient times:

In both of the epics of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the land of ancient Assam was referred as Pragjyotisha and it came to be known as Kamarupa in the medieval times. From available epigraphic evidence, the western boundary of Pragjyotisha was the Kosi River and Pragjyotisha touched Videha on the west at the beginning of the 6th century AD (Barua 1988: 1-2).

Although there is much controversy as to the date of both of the epics, some scholars strongly suggest that the events of the epics were not completely imaginary and are not only myth. Whatever the case may be, we get references and geographical descriptions of the kingdom of Pragjyotisha and various events of the kings from the epics. According to a local tradition, the earliest rulers of Pragjyotisha belonged to the Danava dynasty. The first king of this dynasty was Mahiranga Danava. A most popular and colourful figure of this dynasty was King
Narakasura. According to existing tradition, Naraka ruled over a vast kingdom whose boundary was from the Karatoya River to the Brahmaputra Valley (Barua, 1956:16). Tradition further emphasizes that King Naraka met his death at the hands of Sri Krishna. He was succeeded by his son, Bhagadatta, who finds honourable mention in the *Mahabharata*. King Bhagadatta of Pragjyotisha who had participated in the Kurukshetra War was an ally of the Kauravas with his host of Chinese and *Kirata* troops. He fought valiantly from the back of his elephant and eventually died as a hero.

It is stated in the *Kalika Purana* that King Bana ruled in Sonitpur (modern Tezpur) when Naraka was ruling in Pragjyotisha. The Siva temple of Mahabhairav is attributed to King Bana, who was a pre-Aryan and a devotee of Siva. The well-known Assamese poetical work, *Kumara Harana*, describes the romantic story of Bana's daughter, Usha, who was secretly married by Aniruddha, grandson of Krishna, in most dramatic circumstances (Barua, 1988:3).

A comparable episode to that of Usha and Aniruddha is the marriage of Rukmini to Sri Krishna. Rukmini was the daughter of King Bhismaka who ruled Kundila (believed to be modern Sadiya). Legend also tells the story of Chitrangada of Manipur and Hidimba of Assam. All these legends connect Assam with the outside Aryan world in the prehistoric times.
Varaman Dynasty:

The authentic history of Assam can be said to begin with the Varman dynasty. The first king of this dynasty was Pushyavarman, who ruled in the second quarter of the fourth century, AD. Pushyavarman was a contemporary of Emperor Samudragupta.

The last illustrious and the greatest king of the Varman dynasty was Kumara Bhaskaravarman (594-650 AD). He was a worthy friend of and ally of Emperor Harshavardhana. He recovered the lost territory of his kingdom from the king of Gauda. He extended his kingdom, which covered almost all eastern India and enjoyed a great prosperous life. He was a devotee of Siva. (Barpujari, 1990 Vol. 1 : 110) It was during his reign, that the Chinese scholar Hiuen Tsang visited Kamarupa, and left a valuable report on ancient Kamarupa. Besides the report of scholar Hiuen Tsang there is much information about the great King Bhaskara Varman from the Nidhanpur and Dubi copper-plate inscriptions and from the Harshacharita, written by Banabhatta.

Salastambha Dynasty:

The Varmana Dynasty was followed by the rulers of the Salastambha dynasty who were in power until the end of the tenth century AD. The notable kings of this dynasty were Harshadeva or Sri Harsha Vanamala Varmadeva. The powerful and prominent king Vanamala extended his kingdom far and wide
including Pundravardhana in north Bengal. The prominent historian K. L. Barua writes, "...It is therefore reasonable to suppose that when Bhaskaravarman died, Salastambha who was the governor of the Mech country organized a revolt and that he dethroned the immediate successor of Bhaskara Varman and proclaimed himself as king." (Barua, 1988: 67)

Pala Dynasty:

After the reign of Salastambha dynasty, the Pala dynasty came to the power. Brahmapala, who was elected by the people as their king, obtained the throne of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa in about 900 AD (Barpujari, 1990 Vol. 1: 140). Some of the notable kings of the Pala dynasty were Ratnapala, Indrapala and Dharmapala. Tingyadeva, (1110-1126 AD) a vassal of the Palas of Bengal took over the throne of Kamarupa. Finally Vaidyadeva, a minister of the king of Gauda, defeated Tingyadeva and became the ruler of the region.

The next important and powerful ruler of the kingdom of Kamrup was Prithu. It was during his reign that first Mahammedan invasion of Kamrup took place under the leadership of Mahammad Ibn Bakhtiyar (1205-1206 AD) who was completely annihilated. However, in a later Mahammedan confrontation, Prithu could not prevent the invasion and he was finally overpowered in 1228 AD. After Prithu, two kings of his same dynasty ruled in the kingdom of Kamarupa. The last king of this dynasty was Sandhya, (1250-1270 AD) Perhaps around 1260 AD king of Kamrupa, Sandhya shifted his capital from Kamrup to Kamatapur (Devi, 1987: 69).
The scanty account of the Mahammedan expeditions does not give us enough information to know the condition of the region east of Karotoya river. They prove that the river Karatoya was the western boundary. To know about the eastern portion of the region, we have to turn to the Buranjis or chronicles of the Ahoms who entered the eastern corner of the Brahmaputra valley early in the thirteen century. The Buranjis support the theory that a line of Chutia kings ruled the country east of Subansiri and the Disang and that, several small Bodo tribes enjoyed independence in the south and south east. Further west, there existed the Kachari kingdom. Beyond this Kachari kingdom on the south bank and Chutias on the north, there were a number of petty chiefs known as Bhuyans. The Bhuyans were independent of each other but they joined forces when they were threatened by a common enemy. (Gait, 1992 : 35-36)

Kamatas and Koches:

The Kacharis became powerful in the western region and they extended their kingdom up to Central Assam. West of the Kacharis, there was the Kamata kingdom. Durlabhanarayan was a great king of Kamata. The Khyen line followed the Kamatas. The last Khayen king, Nilambara, was dethroned by King Hussain Shah of Bengal in 1493. After this, some local Bhuyans were prominent in the region.

Then came the Koch dynasty founded by Bisvasingha (1515-1540 AD). His son Naranarayana (1540-1584) was a great ruler. He extended his kingdom
up to North Bengal on the west and Brahmaputra valley on the east, in addition to the neighbouring kingdoms like Cachar, Tripura, Khasi and the Jaintia hills. He was assisted in statecraft and in military power by his brother Sukladhvaja, alias Chilarai. Both the brothers were great patrons of literature, art and other kinds of cultural refinement. After Naranarayana's death the kingdom was split into two. The western part was controlled by Mahammedans and the eastern part eventually came under the Ahom power.

**Ahom Dynasty:**

The invasion of Assam by the Ahoms in the early thirteenth century is very significant in the history of Assam. The appearance of Ahoms changed the political, social and cultural history of Assam. In actuality, the Ahom power unified and consolidated the scattered groups of people into a politically and culturally homogenous unit.

In 1228 A.D., an army of Ahom of the Tai-Shan family came from Burma across the Patkai range and entered Assam under the adventurous leadership of Sukapha. In a series of skillful moves, they subdued the local chiefs and established themselves as masters over a large tract in a short period of time. They overpowered the Chutias and others in the north east, pushed the Kacharis to the south of Brahmaputra and formed an Ahom territory of contiguous areas. In the seventeenth century, the Ahom kingdom extended on the west to the Manah river. However by the eighteenth century, attacks by the Mughal power, internal strife,
including a long civil war known as the Moamaria uprising, and finally the series of Burmese wars brought to an end of the reign of the mighty Ahom power. The British intervention came to Ahom emperor in 1824, and in 1826, Assam passed into the hands of British with the signing the Yandaboo Treaty between the Burmese and the British.

The Ahom kingdom was attacked by the mighty Mahammedans of Delhi, time and again but they could not defeat the Ahoms. It was the greatest glory of Ahom, when Ahom commander-in-chief Lachit Borphukan defeated the Mughal army under the victorious general Ram Singha at the famous battle at Saraighat near Guwahati in 1671 AD. Out of the forty four Ahom rulers, the great conquerors are Suhungmung or Dihingiya Raja (1497-1539), Susengpha or Pratap Singha (1603-1641), Supatpha or Gadadhar Singha (1661-1696) and Sukrungpha or Rudra Singha (1696-1714).

Many of the Ahom rulers were also great builders and patrons of art. The names that excel in this field are Rudra Singha, his sons Sutanpha or Siva Singha (1714-1744), Susenpha or Pramatta Singha (1744-1751), as well as Surampha or Rajesvar Singha (1751-1769).

From their origins of being a race of foreign language and religion, the Ahoms adopted the Assamese language and Hindu religion, and in the course of time, became upholders for the cause of unification and advancement of Assam.
Aryan Migration to Assam:

According to historian H. K. Barpujari, proper Kamarupa was inhabited by Proto-Mongoloid, Proto-Australoid, Tibeto-Burman and Alpine people. The Aryan culture was carried into Assam either by the Alpines from the west, or by the later Brahmanas who had already been mixed with other racial elements when they migrated to Assam. It is likely that these Brahmanas ultimately influenced the culture of ancient Assam. (Barpujari, 1990, Vol. 1: 197) Despite the fact that the influence of this Aryan culture existed here and there, it cannot be denied that the population of Assam was predominantly Mongoloid in character and composition (Barua, 1956: 15). As in other parts of India, the Aryan settlers mixed with the local social groups in Assam. In course of time they accepted and assimilated with the prevailing local people in all aspects of life including biological, linguistic and cultural and extended the intricately woven horizon of social life.

Although many of the people of the plain areas of Assam had an Aryan influence due to the migration from the west, the ruling power in Assam had always been of Mongoloid or tribal origin (Koches, Chutias, Kacharis, Ahoms and Jaintias). Among these Mongoloid or tribal origin kings, some of them were not only powerful administrators, but contributed to the uplifting of their people and land in all social, educational and cultural dimensions.

An opinion prevails now-a-days that the term Aryan does not refer to any ethnic group but it refers to the group of people who spoke the Aryan language (Saikia 1991: 137). The possibility of intrusion of Aryans from North East India in addition to the migration from the west is questionable due to unavailability of authentic documentation (Barua 1973: 243).
An early American missionary, Rev. P. H. Moore, described the plains people of Assam, in his paper ‘General View of Assam’ which was presented in the Jubilee Conference of the Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union held in Nowgong, December 18-29, 1886, as follows:

Take an Aryan substratum, mingle it with it a Mongolian element from the north; then with this mixture a Dravidian element from the west; add to this an element whose quality and quantity are both unknown; once more mingle with this a strong element from the Shan race; allow many centuries for the process of commingling; give now a sprinkling of Burmese; keep in mind that each one of these elements is preserved in every degree of change from absolute purity to the most thorough adulteration; take into account on the one hand a fluctuating immigration not hitherto mentioned, and on the other influence of the tribes on the hill sides that have preserved their aboriginal qualities in various degrees of purity, and you have the people of the plains of Assam (Moore, 1887: 5).

Language and Literature:

Since very early times, the Indo-Aryan Assamese language came to be dominant language of the land. Not only it was spoken by the majority of the population, but it has rich heritage of written literature. According to Dimbeswar Neog, Assamese, along with Bengali, Oriya and Maithili, formed the easternmost group of modern Indian languages which are considered to have come through Magadhi Apabhramsa and to belong originally to the Indic sub-division of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages (Neog, 1982: 37). Although the Assamese language is of Aryan origin, the languages of non-Aryans living in the region had an extensive influence on it. With gradual changes, the Assamese language came to a distinctive form around the tenth or eleventh century. Even before this time, the stone and copper inscriptions of the fourth or fifth century gives us evidence of languages in Assam which were predominantly Sanskrit. Gradual change of Sanskrit language in later period (6th to 12th century)
gave rise to Pali, Prakrit and Apabhramsa. So, we can consider the Assamese language to have begun approximately the eleventh century. It flourished during the next two centuries.

It is true that literature is not the beginning of any language. The oldest specimen of Assamese literature can be found in the *Charyapadas*, which were composed and written during the period of tenth or eleventh century to the fourteenth century (Sarma, 1981: 42).

Assamese language and literature achieved its peak during the Vaishnava era (15th and 16th century). The two great Vaishnava leaders, Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva, contributed to Assamese literature with their popular and brilliant compositions. A chronological description of development of the Assamese literature is included in Chapter VI.

The matter of language and literature of the tribal people was somewhat different. F. S Downs writes, "None of the tribes of the northeastern hills had a written form of their language when the Missionaries first came among them. Because of their Protestant emphasis upon the importance of Christian literacy, the first thing that the missionaries did when beginning work among a new tribe was to reduce its language to writing." (Downs, 1994: 207)

It has already be noted that the 'non-tribal' Assamese society has had a legacy of written literature dating back to at least the tenth or eleventh century and in the fourteenth century it had reached great maturity. The rich Vaishnava spiritual writings of Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva literally flooded in the Brahmaputra valley. So, Assam in the Brahmaputra valley was not a non-literate or pre-literate society. In fact the Missionaries studied the valuable manuscripts to
understand the religious motif of Hindu Sastras. So, the missionaries did not create any Assamese literature, but only revised and uplifted the Assamese literature to a modern style.

**Culture and Religion:**

Both tribal and non-tribal people had their rich traditional cultures and beliefs from the past. The tribal societies are highly integrated. Distinctions cannot be made easily between religious, social, cultural and political elements in the tribal societies. The tribal people lived in their traditional way before the intrusion of the British and the Missionaries.

Before the advent of the British and the Baptist Missionaries, the people of Assam lived happily within its socio-cultural milieu. Assamese people of the Brahmaputra valley were deeply satisfied emotionally, intellectually and spiritually by the teachings of Neo-Vaishnavism introduced by Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva. The followers of Saivism and Saktism and the Muslim religion were also similarly content. All these people were leading a refined type of life. The barriers of caste, creed was minimal, and society was living in harmony and as a homogenous society. True, the Assamese were ignorant of the new scientific world. After coming in contact with the British and the Missionaries, Assamese people came to know about the new objects of modern world, which was a surprise for them. They were attracted by the new things, and their minds were inclined to know more about the new advanced world.

**Conclusion:**

The British administrators and the American Baptist Missionaries both were foreigners to the Assamese. Since both were from the western world they
had many things in common, such as language, habit and customs. But for the
Assamese, the British and the Missionaries were not the same. They considered
the British administrators as their superiors and maintained a distance from them.
On the other hand, the Assamese had a close relationship with the Missionaries due
to their philanthropic activities. As a result, there was a kind of mental rapport
between the Assamese and the Missionaries. However, eventhough the
Missionaries were closer to the Assamese, there was a social gap between the two.

The Missionaries openly petitioned the British administration for the
removal of the Bengali language from Assam. The Missionaries published the first
Assamese magazine, the *Orunodoi*, in which they wrote miscellaneous news of the
world, and through which they introduced the Assamese people to the new world.
The Missionaries criticized the old beliefs and prejudices of Assamese people in the
*Orunodoi*, and created a new consciousness among the Assamese. The
Missionaries were closer to the Assamese because of their effort to promote
education, medical services and specially for their effort to establish the Assamese
language in its own soil.

In reality, we cannot deny the contribution of the British administrative
outfit in the modernization process except for the language issue. The British
administrators opened schools in major towns, and also opened village schools.
The British awarded scholarships and inspired Assamese youths to go for higher
education.

A large group of Assamese students went to Calcutta for higher education,
where they came in contact with the enlightened circle of Bengal. By that time,
Bengal had acquired the modern trend of progressive life. Impressed by the new
progressive trend at Calcutta, people like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan wrote
articles of lofty idealism in the *Orunodoi*, which inspired other Assamese. In addition to the British administrators, other British people, such as tea garden managers, and other business people came in contact with Assamese people in Assam. It is therefore a cumulative contribution of all these factors which gave rise to a new enthusiastic consciousness in the Assamese people.

The Assamese had a very good image of the American Baptist Missionaries because of their philanthropic works. Even some noted Assamese writers mention them as Angels. Coupled with their emotions, the gratitude shown to the Baptist Missionaries by some writers appear to be excessive. The motive of the Missionaries was not understood clearly even by the intellectual Assamese, much less the common people. The purpose of publishing the *Orunodoi* itself has to be viewed with some reservations. Quite a few Assamese scholars are of the opinion that it was published because of the love of the Missionaries towards the Assamese language. But we see some other intentions of the Missionaries.

In a letter to Mr. Danforth by Mr. Brown dated July 4, 1850, Brown writes:

'The *Orunodoi* has been considered by the mission as one of the most powerful instrumentalities for gaining access to the mind of the Assamese, and nothing we have ever done has created such an interest among them --- as did the *Orunodoi* for the first two or three years. No other instrument that we could use would exert half of the influence in enlightening the native mind and undermining their *shaster* as a paper of this kind ---- we found it to succeed beyond our expectation' (Barpujari, 1986 : 156).

Annual report of Assam Mission (May, 1862) states:

'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 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
carelessness, their modes of thought are undergoing a gradual but certain
change.'

In recent years, some research scholars have expressed more rational views
holding that the Orunodoi was 'the mouthpiece both of the evangelists and the
imperialists' (Misra, 1987: 91). The far-sighted Missionaries clearly understood
that Assamese language was the only lingua franca of the region for the
propagation of Christianity in the entire north-east India.

In fact, the British and the American Baptist Missionaries may be said to
have worked hand in hand in Assam. Sometimes it was a passive understanding
and in some cases it was open. Sometimes it was hidden in correspondences. The
Missionaries did not unveil the 'unfair' objectives of the British, rather they praised
them, perhaps expecting favour from the British. Not only the Missionaries, but
even the educated Assamese also joined their hands in support of the British
objectives, expecting to receive favours. The British were naturally happy to see
good words for them in the Orunodoi.

There are evidences which can be cited in support of the view that the
Missionary's sympathy for the cause of the Assamese people was not always
completely selfless. The American Missionaries did not raise their voice for the
well-being of the Assamese without having a 'vested' interest. For example, it is
appropriate to mention that they never raised the issue of independence of Assam.
Rather, the death of martyr Maniram Dewan was reported in the Orunodoi in a
very subdued manner (Neog, 1983: 0.96). By the same token, the news of riots
at Phulaguri near Nagaon, were not properly focused in the *Orunodoi* (Bhuyan, 1986: 30). The Missionaries also never properly raised the issue of the collection of unjustified burdensome revenue from the Assamese people.

However, in some instances, the Missionaries expressed their true opinions although the matters were against the will of the British administrators. The Missionaries fought with the British to prove that Assamese was an independent language and that it should be used in the courts and schools of Assam, replacing Bengali. The Missionaries also showed their leadership in the campaign for the eradication of opium. However, in some instances, the Missionaries gave an ugly picture of Assamese society. We cannot be certain that all Assamese people used opium in those days. It was probably not so. Even the common village people understood that opium eating was a bad habit. We notice this fact in the popular folk songs of Assam (Gogoi, 1985: 254).

To ascertain the superiority of the Christian religion, the Missionaries wrote articles against the Hindu religion. The Missionaries criticized the rituals of Kamakhya temple, and made very derogatory remarks about the temple dancers of the Hayagriva Madhava temple located at Hajo (Neog, 1983: 823). This matter is discussed further in Chapter VIII. Though the Missionaries came to enlighten the people through the Christian gospel, we notice their feeling of ‘white supremacy’ through some of their reports.

Combining all the activities of the Missionaries as a total, we must acknowledge the positive aspects of their contributions. The Missionaries
contribution toward the Assamese language and literature is invaluable. The Missionaries introduced an Assamese dictionary and an Assamese grammar for the first time. They introduced a new style of writing. There were so many subjects here and there without getting any attention in the field of literature, culture and history such as old manuscripts, material culture, ethnography, folklore, numismatics etc. The Missionaries valued these subjects as worthy of study, and drew the attention of the Assamese society by publishing articles in the Orunodoi. A detail discussion of these subjects is made in chapter V.

It is true that main goals and objectives of the Missionaries were to propagate and to convert people into Christianity. But while looking for a path to achieve their goals, whatever contributions they made to the socio-cultural life of nineteenth century Assamese people are precious to the Assamese society. And that is why the the Baptist Missionaries are dear to the Assamese people and their role is an established landmark in the history of Assam.

How the Baptist missionaries came to Assam is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter I

Notes & References

1. Since the name of the American Baptist Missionaries comes very frequently throughout the thesis, henceforth I have used "Baptist Missionaries" or simply "Missionaries" to mean the American Baptist Missionaries.

2. Writings on the American Baptist Missionaries can be classified in the following manner:

   Textbooks written by Assamese scholars; even secondary levels school textbooks dealing with Assamese language and literature contain information on the contribution of the Missionaries in these fields. This subject is fairly elaborately treated in standard histories of both Assamese and English literatures; the most prominent among them being - Mr. D. Neog, Dr. M. Neog and Dr. S. N. Sarma.

   There are some important publications by eminent scholars containing valuable information on the subject such as Dr. H.K. Barpujari (The American Missionaries and North-east India [1836-1900 AD]), Dr. M. Neog (Orunodoi [ed]) and Dr. N. Saikia (Background of Modern Assamese Literature).

3. A map of north-east India showing present seven-sisters states: Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh has been put at the beginning.
Chapter I

**Illustration Section**

(a) Haystack Monument, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA.

(b) Photograph of Rev. (Dr.) Nathan Brown

(c) Photograph of Tomb and Epitaph of Rev. Nathan Brown

(d) Photograph of Rev. (Dr.) Miles Bronson

(e) Photograph of Tomb and Epitaph of Rev. Miles Bronson
Chapter I
Illustration-(a)

Haystack Monument, Williamstown, Massachusetts
Chapter I
Illustration-(b)

Dr. Nathan Brown
June 22, 1807 to January 1, 1886
Source: Historical Society of American Baptist Missionaries,
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
Chapter I
Illustration-(c)

Tomb and Epitaph of Rev. Nathan Brown

GO TEACH ALL NATIONS
REV. NATHAN BROWN
BORN AT NEW IPSWICH, N.H.
JUNE 22, 1807,
DIED AT YOKOHAMA, JAPAN
JANUARY 1, 1886.
A MISSIONARY TO BURMAH,
ASSAM AND JAPAN 35 YEARS,
AND TRANSLATOR OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT INTO
ASSAMESE AND JAPANESE.
HE BORE THE LAMP OF LIFE
TO TRIBES IN DARKNESS,
AND IN HIS COUNTRY'S PERIL
STOOD FOR GOD AND FREEDOM.

The vows of God are on me and I may not stop
To play with shadows or pluck earthly flowers
Till I may work have done.

BROWN
Chapter I
Illustration-(d)

Dr. Miles Bronson
July 20, 1812 to November 9, 1883
Source: Historical Society of American Baptist Missionaries,
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
Chapter I
Illustration-(e)

Tomb and Epitaph of Rev. Miles Bronson

IN MEMORIAM
REV. MILES BRONSON
BORN JULY 20, 1812
DIED NOV. 9, 1883
FOR 43 YEARS A MISSIONARY
TO ASSAM, INDIA
ERECTED BY HIS LOVELY CHILDREN