



OUTLINING ON EARLY DAYS OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AMONG THE BOROS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract:

The Christian missionaries made a unique contribution towards the early creation of written Boro language and pave the way for its growth and development in the subsequent years. In the early part of 19th century the Christian missionaries came among the Boros to preach Christian religion and undertook some benevolent works for the elevation of humanity with a view to attract people towards Christianity. The missionaries also played a significant role in the backward tribal societies by bringing about changes in their socio-economic and cultural lives.

Literature Review:

No serious research based study on the early days of Christian missionaries among the Boros has yet been carried out by any scholar using all the available sources. In fact, some scholars have been brought to light on the subject matter in their respective works. However, still await thorough investigation and treatment within a wide canvas.

Methodology:

The methodology adopted in this paper is historical based on primary and secondary sources. The collected data -both primary and secondary have been analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Comparative study is also made whenever it is necessary to highlight an accurate picture of the subject.

Towards the close of 18th century the East India Company having established itself as a paramount power in India, followed a policy of neutrality, as "in the matter of religion the natives of India were peculiarly sensitive". So, William Carey, the first British missionary was prohibited from preaching when he arrived in Calcutta for the purpose. He was compelled to make Serampur his head quarter under the Danish flag. The Charter of India, 1813, permitted the missionaries to reside in the Company's territories under certain conditions. This resulted in the advent of the missionaries in India from England and America (Borpujari: 1968: XI-XII).

On request of the Magistrate of Sylhet William Carey deputed Krishna Pal, his earliest convert to North East India for the spread of gospel. Krishna Pal started his missionary work in Goalpara and Kamrup. In 1829 James Rae set up a branch of the mission at Gauhati, under the patronage of David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier. In 1834 soon after the assumption of the agent to the Governor General, Francis Jenkins wanted to pacify the Kamties and Singphos who continued to disturb the tranquility of the frontier, by spread of gospel. On his invitation to American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Rev. Nathan Brown and Oliver T. Cutter reached Sadiya with their families and with a printing press on 23rd March 1836. In 1841 Nidhi Ram, the first Assamese, was converted to Christianity at Jaipur and he was followed by Bati Ram, Ramsing and Kalibar. In 1838 they brought Gauhati mission in their hand. In 1914 Rev. G.K. Campor was deputed to Darrang district to work for the American Baptist Mission (Islary: 1998).

It was felt that it would be easier to preach the gospel among the Boro Kosharies at the foot of the Bhutan hills in the northern tract of Brahmaputra valley. The simplicity of their behavior and lifestyle, and also the bulk of their population attracted the missionaries to work among the Boro Kocharies of this tract.

"Freed from religious prejudices, the Kocharies at the foot of the hills north of Kamrup and Darrang were found apparently ready for receipt of the gospel. Barker is reported to have made several excursion among this tribes and had discussion on the subject with those who came to Gauhati church" (Borpujari: 1968: XIX).

Rev. E.W. Clark writes, "I note first a large body of Cacharies or Kocharies who constitute an important element of the population of the north side of the Brahmaputra River in Assam and said to extend nearly Darjeeling. The Kocharies are allied to Garos in language and belong to the aboriginal races of India, which have been found much easier to Christianize than the Hindu, Mohomedan, or Buddhist. Where Cachari community lived many years alongside of Assamese Hindu and mingled with them, they frequently take on something Hindu faith and caste also acquire a limited use of the Assamese language. Though ruder and less cleanly in customs and dress than Assamese they are said to be more truthful and honest. I understand that in the later years a few of this people have been baptized into the membership of the Gauhati Baptist Church. Possibly these conversion are in intimation from the lord that we should enter the field and cultivate it" (Clark: 1992:219).

The activities of the Christian missionaries among the Boro Kocharies have significance in the social development of Boros. But no enquiry has been made into the attitude of the missionaries towards Boros, among

whom they worked. So answers to some important questions have to be found out. With what object in view did the missionaries come to the Boros? Were they successful in their mission? How far were the missionaries responsible for the transition in the Boro society? These are some important point to be examined.

Various denominations of Christian missionaries came among the Boros with missionary zeal. The various missionary denominations, which came among the Boros, are as follows:

The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to come into contact with the Boro Kocharies. After the establishment of a centre at Gauhati in 1843 they started a Boarding school in the year 1846, where a few number of Boro pupils were admitted. Out of them a pupil named Apentha from the Jhargaon village of North Kamrup was baptized in 1849 at Gauhati Church. However, the American Baptist mission was concentrated mainly on the Garo and in 1965 they entrusted the Australian Baptist Missionary society to work among the Boros. The Australian Baptist Mission in turn handed over the task to local management and since then the Boro Baptist mission in Goalpara has been known as the Goalpara Baptist Church Union (Ayilookunnel: 1997:45).

Mr. Hessel Mayor who belongs to Anglican Church came to Tezpur for the spread of gospel and established the S.P.G. Society. The S.P.G. worked among the Boro Kocharies in and around Tezpur. Rev. Sidney Endle was deputed by the society for the propagation of gospel and he arrived at Tezpur in the year 1864. By that time a number of Boros had already been converted to Christianity. Rev. Endle was successful in establishing a full-fledged church at Bengnabari near Harisinga (Ayilookunnel: 1997:45). The Mission was established in 1841. "In 1881 Rev. J.P. Smitheman and S. Endle were the missionaries assisted by three preachers, ten Christian teachers and ten non-Christian teachers. The native Christians numbered three in 1851; seventy in 1861; one hundred and thirty in 1871; and two hundred and ten in 1881. In the later years there were thirty five communicants, four adult baptisms and two congregations (Clark: 1992:212).

The Indian Home Mission Society had established a colony in Goalpara district and did most interesting and prosperous work among the Santals. In 1863 Rev. L. Skrefsruds arrived in India and dedicated his work among the Santals. In 1880 an agricultural colony or Christian settlement was established in Dingdinga area of Western Assam, by emmigrating quite a number of Santal families from Bengal. It became successful. The colonies contain several hundred Christians and a Church was built to accommodate one thousand people and schools were opened (Clark: 1992:212&213).

The missionaries also came into contact with neighbouring Boro villages and invited them to the Church. As early as 1887 a good number of Boros accepted gospel and came to the Church. By 1922 the number of converts among the Boros increased and centers were opened at Gaurang (near Kokrajhar), Bongaigaon and Parkijuli in Kamrup (Ayilookunnel: 1997:45).

Rev. Holger Winding, a missionary from Denmark working for Santal Mission to the Northern Churches (S.M.N.C.), was joined by Rev. Aksel Khristiansena, who came to India in 1927. Then Holger Windings independently worked on Santal mission and Aksel Khristiasena took independent charge torun the Boro Church. As a result the Gaurang district wasformed in 1929, and after the arrival of Norwegianian missionaries Andres Malme and his wife Else Malme. Gaurang district was divided into two districts-Bongaigaon and Gaurang. And in 1958 they were named as Northern Lutheran Church.

The Scottish Prebyterian Church, which began its work among the Nepalis of Darjeeling, by 1870, gradually extended its service to the Boros of Duar areas. They entered among the Boros, learned Boro language and propagated the gospel. They established a centre at Panbari to carry out the missionary work. They did extensive work among the Boros of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and initiated a number of them to their religion. "The names to be remembered for their pioneering work among the Boros of Jalpaiguri district are Ranglal Narzari and Rev. Jitnal Narzinari" (Ayilookunnel:1997:45&46).

Though late the Roman Catholic missionaries began their work in Assam under the initiative of two catholic priests Fr. Stepen Cacella and Fr. John Gabral in the year 1893. Initially they concentrated their work on the hills tribes and could not pay attention to the plains of Assam due to lack of personal. By 1928 Fr. Piasieski was invited to Udalguri by some Boros, where he baptized them. From 1933 two missionaries Fr. Alessi and Fr. Ravalico carried out their work among the Boros of Darrang district. It was by that time that Beha Basti of Kamrup and a few families of Kimarikatha came to the Catholic faith. In Kokrajhar district first Catholic community was established at Nangdorbari village. At the invitation of Phulsing, a Boro leader, Fr. Scunderi visited them and received them into the Catholic Church. An orphan young man, named Gendra Champramari of Bengtol was sent by Phulsing to Guwahati, where he was baptized. Then he was given training at Tezpur (1934-45). After that he became main instrument of Fr. Morengo (new Bishop, Morengo) in pursuing evangelical work among the Boros. The villages, Digholdong, Raisundri, Patgaon, Jolaigaon, Dangdupur and in Kamrup, Kalajhar, Bogriguri etc. received the Catholic faith (Brahma: 2006:48).

Barpeta was detached from Guwahati and a new centre was opened at Barpeta in 1936, and a Boarding school was opened at Barpeta to train Christianity. New missions were opened in 1966 and at Saraibil in 1972, and then followed by Gossaigaon, Dotma, Basbari, Bongaigaon, Ballamguri and Kokrajhar. In Darrang district the Parish of Tangla was opened in 1951 and mission was established at Udalguri in 1966. Today they have also centres at Mongoldoi, Ambagaon, Rowta, Dimakuchi and Masbat.

The relationship between the missionaries of different denominations seems to be close outwardly, but all of them are independent and have very little co-ordination among themselves. Very often they do not hesitate to criticize one another in the matter of functioning. The differences between denominations prevent the Christian missionaries from acting as united force in Kokrajhar region. The denominational difference, especially between the Protestant groups and the Catholic faith, is reflected even in school administration. The students of other sect of Christianity in missionary schools do not enjoy the concessions, which are enjoyed by the students of the same denomination, which runs the school.

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