

CHAPTER 2

ADVENT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN ASSAM

Christianity in India can be traced back to the middle of the first century when St. Thomas arrived in South India in A.D 52 and preached among the inhabitants there. The tomb of St. Thomas bears to this testimony. However, there are two views ascribing the beginning of christianity in India. The western tradition is believed to have recorded that St. Thomas reached India in the middle of the first century following the well established trade routes.¹ It is said that he preached the gospel of Christ in Parthia and India and converted many to christianity. Some of the converts included members of royal families. He travelled in the coastal region southwards then he moved to Coromandel Coast, where he attended martyrdom and was buried there. Later, his body was transferred to the west (to Edessa). According to Indian tradition, St. Thomas came by sea and landed at Cranganore in about A.D 52 and converted high caste families.² He travelled southwards and founded churches in places like Maliankara (near Cranganore), Palayur, Parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Quilon. Of these four are Syrian Churches which still exist. Following this, it is said that he crossed over to the east coast and travelled eastwards to Malacca and China. St. Thomas finally returned to India and organized the christians of Malabar and moved to Coromandel where he preached the gospel. This aroused the hostility of the Brahmins and he was speared to death. The year of martyrdom is said to have been A.D. 72. His body was brought to Mylapore and buried.

The next contact was with the Persian or the East Syrian Church whose bishop was believed to have evangelized the Indian people between A.D 250 and A.D 300.³ After them the Portuguese missionaries arrived in India towards the end of the 15th century.⁴ The next Christian mission to come and spread Christianity in India was the Danish mission. All these missionaries' activities were carried out in the mainland of India and had no bearing on North East India.

The christian missionaries in Assam are believed to have visited the province on 26th September 1626 when the two Jesuit missionaries namely Fr. Stephen Cacella and Fr. John Cabral halted at Gauhati on their way to Tibet and China.⁵ This is confirmed from his letter written from Bhutan dated 4th October 1627. Cacella gives an account of their visit to Goalpara and Kamrup in Assam.⁶ This letter however, does not contain any mention of any local Christian at that time. After more than a century again in 1790 Roman Catholic Christians of Portuguese origin were seen to be settled at Bondashill in Cachar district. But there is no record of any missionary activities from that settlement.⁷

The missionary activities in India and in the North East India can be traced from 11th November 1793, the day on which William Carey arrived in Calcutta.⁸ For the first ever time William Carey with the assistants of Jasua Marshman and William Ward, established Serampore Mission on 10th January 1800 under the Danish Flag.⁹ In 1813, the Charter Act of India was passed which permitted the missionaries to reside in the company's territories under certain conditions. Under the provision of the Act the missionaries from England and America began to come to India with the zeal to preach the gospel. It has been pointed out by J.P. Marshall, "*With the passing of the Charter Act of 1813, which permitted the missionaries to preach the gospel in India, the missionaries of Serampore took the first opportunity to extend their activities to the North Eastern Frontier of India.*"¹⁰

In order to expand the missionary activities, he needed local missionaries. Therefore to train the Indians for missionary work, William Carey founded the Serampore College in 1818 and in 1827 it was made a Christian Theological University in India.¹¹ Carey undertook several projects to translate the Bible into the Indian languages. He personally mastered Bengali and Sanskrit languages and did the translation in these two languages. The other versions were done by the others but they were revised by him. For Assamese, Atmaram Sarma of Koliabor of Nagaon District was given the responsibility to translate the Bible in 1811.¹² Thus, the Assamese New Testament came out in 1819 and the Old Testament in 1833.¹³ With this Assamese version of the Bible, work of evangelization was expected to be carried out in Assam. In the 19th century, the Serampore Mission was the first among the missionaries to give full dedication in the region. It also began to take interest in the Khasi Hills. In 1813 W. N. Garret, Judge at Sylhet invited Willam Carey to

evangelize several hundred Khasi tribesmen who had settled in company territory.¹⁴ They were believed to be refugees from inter-tribal warfare in the adjoining hills. Garrett proposed 'two or three hundred of the fugitives should be made christians at once by baptism.'¹⁵ William Carey responded to the letter of W.N. Garrett. He sent his first Bengali convert, Krishna Chandra Pal who was baptized by Carey on 28th December 1800 for the spread of gospel. He engaged himself in preaching at Pandua at the foot of the Khasi Hills.¹⁶ The result was the conversion of two Khasis (U Duwan and U Anna) and one Assamese.¹⁷ He baptized them but after the departure of Krishna Chandra Pal the work was not continued and nothing much was heard about the converts. But Serampore had not forgotten the Khasi mission. In the course of short span of time Mr. Alexander B. Lish, who was ordained in Calcutta in 1832, was sent to Cherrapunji together with a Bengali preacher named Jan and Mr. Joshau Rowe. Mr. Lish left Cherrapunji for Calcutta due to ill- health. Shortage of personnel was a problem which could not be solved. So an amalgamation of the Serampore Mission with that of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1837 was necessitated which eventually led to the closure of the work in the Khasi Hills.

Meanwhile James Rae, the Superintendent of public works at Dacca, resigned from the government service as he wanted to be a missionary. He was trained at Serampore College. He arrived at Gauhati in July 1829 with his wife and a little child accompanied by an Indian assistant Ram Chandra Nath. In the same year, he set up a branch of the mission at Gauhati, under the patronage of David Scott. David Scott was the Governor General of the North East Frontier. In 1830, Rev. James Rae was fortunate to have twelve interesting youths- three Khasis and nine Garos.¹⁸ He was indeed committed in spreading the message of God. There were people who were willing to accept christianity but could not openly confess due to fear of persecution and social ostracization. He however toured extensively and visited several places. Wherever he went, he distributed New Testament even in Hindu temples. He was successful in the foundation of the first christian church in the Assam valley but unfortunately it did not survive more than a year because two of the members were suspended from communion because of immoral living. James Rae had to face several challenges and he could not withstand them at times. Further, due to the demise of his wife and the departure of Ram Chandra Nath and due to his ill health, he was no longer in a position to continue his mission work. Therefore when the American

Baptist Missionaries arrived in Assam, he retired from the missionary work and handed over the mission to them. He returned to Serampore and took up the educational work under the British Government.

In response to various pleas, a second missionary Mr. Robinson was sent to Gauhati, who in the course of time opened several schools. Robinson made a tour of several places pleading for funds to establish an English school. But due to discouragement at Gauhati or lack of the interest among the church members and closure of the school, the work there came practically to a standstill. In 1837-1838 the Serampore Mission Station was amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society. It was decided to handover the Assam and Arracan fields to the American Baptist Mission.¹⁹

Initially the objective of the first American Baptist Mission in the North East was to reach out to the Shan tribes of Northern Burma and Southern China. It was only at the later stage they turned their attention towards the people of the Brahmaputra valley. By 1834, the Kamties and Singphos continued to disturb the tranquillity of the frontier. It was the intention of the Commissioner of Assam to pacify them by spreading the gospel. So in 1835 the Commissioner of Assam, Captain Francis Jenkins offered an invitation to American Baptist Mission in Burma to work among the Kampti and Singpho tribal. Accordingly the missionaries of the 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 1836.²⁰ In 1838 they brought Gauhati mission in their hand. Nathan Brown was of the opinion that the Assamese language was a branch of Bengali language but when he realized that it was a separate language he began to learn and love the Assamese language. Miles Bronson a linguist also joined them and proved that he was one of the first American Baptist Missionaries to work in the state of Assam in North East India. On 8th July 1838 Miles Bronson arrived at Sadiya in Assam. 13th June 1841 goes down in the history of christianity in Assam as a remarkable date as Nidhiram alias Nidhi Levi Farwell²¹ became the first Assamese Christian baptized by Miles Bronson in the Buri Dihing River near Jaipur.²² Nidhiram was an orphan. He was followed by Batiram, Ramsing and Kolibor.²³ By 1845 several mission stations had been established at Sibsagar, Nowgaon and Gauhati, but an organized church came to be established only on 26th

January 1845.²⁴ This became the oldest church in the North East India. There were 77 members in the Gauhati Baptist Church. The first pastor of this church was Rev. Cyrus Barker.²⁵ In 1878, the station was left in the care of Rev. Kandura R. Smith commonly known as Kandura, who was the first Assamese convert in Gauhati.²⁶ He had been brought from his parents while still a boy and was brought up in the 'Nowgong Orphan Institution'. He seemed to possess unusual abilities and was made incharge of the station with full authority of the mission. His wife was in charge of the girls' school of the Nagaon mission. On 6th June 1897, there was an earthquake in Assam and much property was damaged. In that earthquake, the church building was completely destroyed. After selection of several sites, a church was built. The hut currently housing the office of the Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital is said to be that church.

In 1914, all the Baptist Churches in Assam formed themselves into Assam Baptist Convention. This organization expanded in its stature and in January 1950 there was an amalgamation of the churches under Assam Baptist Missionary Conference and formed the Council of Baptist Churches in Assam (C.B.C.A) whose first General Secretary was Rev. A. F. Merrill. Soon the Manipur Church was also added to the Council and the name was changed to (C.B.C.A.M), which finally was further changed to the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India (C.B.C.N.E.I).²⁷ All the Baptist Churches in Assam, Arunachal, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland were brought within its umbrella. Over the years the C.B.C.N.E.I had grown to over 7000 churches in 100 organized associations.²⁸ The Baptist church overcame distance barrier, isolation and many other obstacles. They sowed the seeds of the gospel in every nook and corner of the North East India including the hills and the plains. The early missionaries left no stone unturned to spread out the message of the gospel to the people. However, the impact of missionary work in Assam, as a whole benefitted all people irrespective of caste, tribe, religion, language etc.

The Welsh Presbyterians (Welsh Calvinist Methodists) had their first missionary step at Cherrapunji in 1841. Cherrapunji at that time was less known to the world. It was only after the British administration made the place its district headquarters that it became well known. Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Jones were the first missionaries who arrived at Cherrapunji on 2nd June 1841 to work among the Khasis.²⁹ They first encountered stiff oppositions from the Khasis. But in spite of all

odds the missionaries continued their works and as a result people began to show interest in the religion of the missionaries. Gradually people began to accept the new faith. In 1843 the mission centre was shifted to Nogsawlia hill near Cherrapunji as the village chief gave this place to the missionaries. It was from this place the missionaries could begin their missionary activities. The first conversion took place on 8th March, 1846. But the Welsh Mission gradually expanded their missionary activities even in other hill areas. However, the growth of christian community among the Khasis and Jaintias was very slow till 1880s. Despite the slow progress they were not disheartened. Thus, by the end of the 19th century and early parts of the 20th century, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission had well established both church structures and educational systems among the Khasis and Jaintias.

Presbyterian Church also set foot in the Lushai Hills and began work in the year 1897. D.E. Jones was the first missionary to work among the Mizos. He was assisted by a Khasi convert. In 1899 two Mizos Khuma and Khara by name were converted and baptized as the first christians in Mizoram. In a time span of 32 years i.e. by 1929, the Mizo Christian community grew to more than 27720. Today the Presbyterian Church of India that was renamed in 1992 is one of the main churches in India with over one million believers, mostly in North East India. P.C.I has eight Synods such as Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod, Cachar Hill Tribes Synod, Manipur Presbyterian Church Synod, Biateram Presbyterian Church Synod, Ri Bhoi Presbyterian Church Synod, Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod, Sepngi (KJP Synod Sepngi), KJP Synod Mihngi, and Zou Presbyterian Church Synod. The P.C.I has its headquarters in Shillong. The P.C.I maintains relationship with denominations such as the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Presbyterian Church of Korea, Uniting Church in Australia, the Presbyterian Church in Wales, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the Protestant church in Netherland and the Presbyterian Church in Singapore. It also maintains relations with the Christian Conference of Asia (C.C.A) and the Council for World Mission (C.W.M), World communion of reformed Churches (W.C.R.C), National Council of Churches in India (N.C.C.I) and Church Auxiliary for Social Action (C.A.S.A), Christian Institute for the Studies of Religion and Society (C.I.S.R.S) and Oikocredit.

In the North East it keeps close ties with the Council of Baptist Churches in North East India and the Church of North India. Besides it has membership in the

N.C.C.I, World Council of Churches (W.C.C), World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Maraland Presbyterian Church.

The Anglican (Church of England) did not have missionary plan in the North East India. Mathew Muttumana wrote, “*Although the Anglican clergy were the first to come to Assam with political support and financial grants, they showed very little interest in the evangelization of the native people for a long time.*”³⁰

It had appointed a few regular chaplains to look after the spiritual needs of the European members of their denominations. The first Anglican missionary to visit Assam valley was Rev. A. Grastin, Chaplain of Sylhet who visited the scattered Europeans who came to Assam valley in 1841.³¹ In 1842 the Bishop Wilson of Calcutta appointed Rev. Robert Bland as Chaplain of Assam. He reached Assam in 1844 and took charge at Gauhati. The Church of England also had chaplain supported jointly by the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (S.P.G) and the tea companies for the benefit of the British tea planters. These chaplains got involved in some missionary works. The first tea garden chaplain was Rev. Sydney Endle who arrived at Tezpur in 1864.³² The Anglican missionaries took over a small mission that had started at Tezpur in 1847 or 1848 by a British officer, Capt. J.T Gordon. Gordon had two German missionaries of the Bassel Mission viz. C.H Hesselmeyer and G. Duable, for the purpose of evangelizing the people of Bhutan.³³ When they learned that their mission would be impracticable they took up work among the Kacharis living in Darrang district not far from Tezpur. The mission was supported from local sources and occasionally with some government aid. But it soon faced difficulties, especially after the death of Gordon. Duable, eventually joined the American Baptist Mission. In 1862, Hesselmeyer handed over the mission to the S.P.G. Rev. Sidney Endle worked with Hesselmeyer after his arrival in 1864. By then a few Kacharis were converted. But the mission could not expand. By the turn of the century not more than 500 Indian members were registered in the Anglican Church in Assam.

During the famines that struck Bihar in the late 1880s the missionaries of the Santal Mission of the Northern Churches established a Santal Christian Colony in Guma Duar in the district of Goalpara in Assam, where some Santal Christians from Bihar were settled. Skrefsrud together with six Santals surveyed the land of colony in Assam and on behalf of the Santals made an agreement with the Assam government

for their settlement. Following this Rev. Boerson brought forty two Santal families on 8th February 1881 to settle in Assam.³⁴ This is how the Santal Christian colony in Assam was established in 1880.

One of the most important denominations to begin work during the second half of the nineteenth century was the Roman Catholic Church. Like the American Baptists, the interest of the Roman Catholic Church in Assam was associated with attempts to find an easy route to Tibet. Ever since the expulsion of the Capuchins from Tibet in 1745, further efforts were made to find a way back into that country. The Paris Foreign Mission Society (MEP) could not find a way through China and so they thought that Assam being within British India would provide an alternate route. Therefore, in June 1850 three missionaries viz. Fr. Julian Rabin, Nicholas Michael Krick and Louis-Marie-Noel Bernard arrived in Gauhati.³⁵ Though their main objective was finding a way to Tibet, they involved to a certain extent with local communities.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AMONG THE BODOS

Christian missionaries of several denominations came among the Bodos to work. In the history of the Bodo church, there is no record of the contact of the Bodos of Assam with the missionaries till the middle of the 19th century. It was in the middle of the 19th century the christian missionaries of different denominations and societies made their inroads among the Bodos in different parts of Assam and Bengal. Till this stage, there was no separate mission of any denominations addressed to the Bodos. The important denominations that came to work among the Bodos were the American Baptist Missionaries, the Anglican Church, Indian Home Mission Society later known as Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church. The Bodo church as a whole is a century old now. However, the growth of Christianity among the Bodos is very slow compared to other ethnic groups in the North- East India.

THE BAPTIST MISSION

The christian mission work among the Bodos began with the American Baptist Mission with its' headquarters at Gauhati. The American Baptist Mission with its headquarters at Gauhati was the first mission society to evangelize the Bodos of Assam. Rev. Cyrus Barker soon after he had established a mission centre at Gauhati in 1843 tried to contact the Bodos with the gospel of Christ. One of the initiatives was to establish a boarding school at Gauhati in which a number of pupils from different ethnic groups could be accommodated. Accordingly in 1846 a young Bodo boy of twelve years named Aphinta from Jhargaon village of North Kamrup joined the school. Three years later in 1849 Aphinta was baptized at Gauhati.³⁶ Aphinta thus went down in the history of the evangelization of the Bodos of Assam and elsewhere in India as the first Bodo christian.

The American Baptist Mission in North East India gave due recognition to the Goalpara Mission field of Lower Assam in the evangelization of the Bodos. The A.B.M began their mission work in 1867 when Rev. Miles Bronson founded the American Baptist Mission centre at Goalpara town after buying a plot of land for Rs. 800/- only.³⁷ But evangelization under Tukurbari Scottish Church had already begun. It was in 1908 that preaching had taken place at Burijhar No. 2 village under Tukurbari Scottish Church. Following this, Mr. Areng Islary and his wife Gurumoti Islary became christian.³⁸ In the same year from Tukurbari Scottish church a few members viz. Lakisoron Narzary, Durgasoron Narzary and Gorsingh Narzary together with their families migrated to Burijhar village.³⁹ They together with Areng Islary and Guromoti Islary established a Scottish Church. After this another Scottish Church came into existence at Balajhar village in 1911 when Mohendra Moshahary, a missionary of Mahakalguri Scottish Mission converted Joison Narzary, Monia, Pomon, Gual, Jogolal Narzary and Amol Narzary and established a Scottish Mission centre at Balajhar. These two Scottish churches amalgamated with the American Baptist Mission in 1913.⁴⁰

Rev. A.E Stephenson was succeeded by Rev. A.C Bower who came to Goalpara town in 1909.⁴¹ He was the most important missionary of the A.B.M who paid particular attention to the Bodos. It was during his tenure the names of Buha Basumatary and Dankhao Basumatary both with their families have been recorded as

first christians of Fundibari village.⁴² Both the families became members of the Naigaon Garo Baptist church. Meanwhile certain Hilarues Basumatary from Kotiatoli Nagaon who was baptized by Rev. Godhula Brown in Sibsagar district of upper Assam was also found preaching the gospel in the Goalpara district. In the course of his evangelical work, he came in contact with Buha Basumatary and Dangkao Basumatary. For the purpose of evangelization in 1910 Hilarues shifted to Fundibari. Mr. Buha Basumatary, Dangkao Basumatary and Hilarues Basumatary began to preach the gospel among the Bodos of Goalpara district. The result was that two more new families were added to the church at Fundibari in 1911. They were the families of Dev Narayan Basumatary and Buha Basumatary (not the previous Buha Basumatary). The trio while visiting the villages met the members of the Scottish church at Balajhar village. It has also been found recorded that people from Batagaon used to visit Fundibari during rainy season to trade in sal logs which could be transported with the river current of Garlajhora. These traders while halting at Fundibari listened to the gospel message from Hilarues Basumatary. Moved by the message of Christ these villagers requested him to visit their village and preach among them. Accordingly Hilarues Basumatary preached in the village and some family's viz. Jidi Basumatary, Hapsu Oja Lal Buha (Fataru), Suniram Basumatary, Rubi Basumatary, Gohong Basumatary, Rajasingh (Khorogede) and Latibor were baptized by Rev A.C. Bower in 1912. After this Rev. A.C Bower baptized Mr. Harun Basumatary son of Hilarues Basumatary, Bahadur Basumatary of Samtaibari village, Pua Mahajwn, Maibra and Kanda Rabha. These new christians established a church at Gendergaon in 1914. In the year 1915, some christian members from Batagaon and Gendergaon shifted to the north of Kashikotra and established a new village named Bamungaon. They were eighteen families in all. In the same year 1915, Batabari church was established by Mr. Saodo Narzary and Bajarsingh Gaonbura. In 1916 Mr. Durgasuran Narzary of Burijhar Baptist church established a new church at Balagari east of Ouguri village. In 1919, the total number of the Bamungaon Baptist christians increased to thirty three families. In 1922 Rev. A.C Bowers organized a Bible class at Dhubri town. Following this, a church was established at Laoripara village but the non christians opposed it and burnt down the church. Even the small christian community was also persecuted. Rev. A.C Bower was recalled from Gauhati headquarters in 1922. He was a popular missionary among the Bodos. He used his own vehicle to visit villages and

churches. He even used steamboat to reach the churches in both sides of the river Brahmaputra. During his ministry seventy eight Bodos were baptized.

As per records, there were five Bodo Baptist churches in north Goalpara district by 1922.⁴³ Balajhar Baptist church was used as temporary headquarters. All the missionary activities in north Goalpara were monitored from the Gauhati Baptist mission centre. It was only during the three days of annual conferences in each February they could be with the Bodo churches in persons. So they decided to entrust Rev. Gobe Marak, a Garo evangelist to look after the Bodo Baptist churches in north Goalpara. He could visit the Bodo Baptist churches twice a year either for performing baptism or for Lord's Supper. Another evangelist Rev. Dev Narayan Basumatary was entrusted to look after the wedding ceremonies in those Bodo churches. After the retirement and departure of Rev. A.C Bower the responsibility of looking after the missionary activities of old Goalpara district fell on Rev. Stephen. Rev. Stephen carried out his mission work from Gauhati as the mission station was shifted from Dhubri to Tura after Rev. A.C Bower. He was appointed for a very short period. He was replaced by Rev. O. L Swonson for one year. It was Rev. O.L Swonson who organized the first annual conference of the Bodo Baptist Churches of Goalpara district at Balajhar near Tukrajhar in 1923.⁴⁴

From 1924-1928 Rev. A.J. Tuttle was made in- charge of the churches of Goalpara district.⁴⁵ Rev. Tuttle was fortunate to get the assistance of a Garo evangelist named Uman K. Marak who was sent to Tukrajhar in 1927. The Bodo Baptist community of that area warmly welcomed him. He was a very energetic evangelist. He appeared to be God fearing, humble and honest. People used to listen to him with much respect. As he set foot at Balajhar he planned to lead that church in the right direction. It was under able leadership of Uman K. Marak a committee of Bodo Baptist churches of the northern part of Goalpara district was formed in 1927 and named it as 'Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union' with Toraram Iswary as the president and Abhra Basumatary as its secretary and Rang Bhandar and Jella Narzary as office bearers.⁴⁶

In 1930 in his own capacity Uman K. Marak, laid the foundation of mission compound and the headquarters of Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union at Tukrajhar.⁴⁷ Under his guiding evangelization by 1932 there were ten Bodo Baptist

Churches under Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union viz. 1. Burihar Baptist Church, 2. Balajhar Baptist Church, 3. Bamungaon Baptist Church, 4. West Patabari, 5. East Balagari Baptist Church, 6. Bhurpar Baptist Church, 7. Amlaida Baptist Church, 8. No. 1 Tukrajhar Baptist Church, 9. No. 2. Tukrajhar Baptist Church and 10. Laoripara Baptist Church. After 5 years of committed and successful missionary activities Uman K. Marak left Tukrajhar in December, 1932.

Later Rev. A.J Tuttle, Rev. David was given the charge of Gauhati Baptist Mission from 1929. He continued up to 1932.⁴⁸ But before he could complete his term he had to leave for U.S.A due to eye trouble. He was replaced by Dr. V.H. Sword in 1933. He was also helped by a local missionary named Maniram Basumatary. On the directives of Dr. V.H Sword he went to Tukrajhar in 1933. He was also a successful missionary and was able to add four new churches. Till 1938, the Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union was looked after by him. But on the directives of Dr. V.H Sword he went back to Gauhati in 1938. In 1938 Dr. V.H Sword was on leave. During this period Miss Marion Bernham a lady missionary was entrusted with the charge for a brief period.⁴⁹ Dr. V.H Sword was given charge again in 1939 and continued up to 1943. In 1943 Rev. J. M. Forbes assumed the responsibility of the Bodo churches.⁵⁰ It was during his period a significant development took place when the Bodo churches were handed over to Australian Baptist Mission Society in 1946. It coincided with the time when the A.B.M.S was looking for mission field in Assam. By this time the number of churches increased to fifteen.

The American Baptist Mission did not send any missionary to Tukrajhar after Uman K. Marak and Maniram Basumatary. They monitored the mission field from Gauhati and continued it till the handing of the mission field to the Australian Baptist Mission in 1947. The A.B.M established sixteen Bodo Churches with the total membership of nine hundred and ninety six in their work span of 68 years (1878-1946). They handed over its works among the Bodos to the Australian Baptist Missionary Society. The aspirations of the Bodos were that the missionaries should come and stay with them. The A.B.M.S established its mission station at Tukrajhar now in Chirang District, incorporating a Garo pocket at Baughpara, north of Dhubri and another Rabha pocket at Debitola.⁵¹

The American Baptist Mission was finding it difficult to continue the missionary work due to lack of personnel in Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union. Therefore during the tenure of Rev. J.M. Forbes (1943-46), the American Baptist Mission planned to hand over the Boro Baptist Mission field of the northern Goalpara district to the Australian Baptist Mission. In 1946 they started to negotiate with the Australian Baptist Missions on handing over the Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union to the Australian Baptist Missionary Society. By 14th April 1947 the American and Australian Baptist Missions arrived at a common consensus that from 1st May 1947 Australian Baptist mission would look after mission work among the Bodos in the area from the north of the Brahmaputra River to Bhutan.⁵² The Australian Baptist Missionary Society sent Rev. Wilf and Mrs Gwentyth Crofts as the first missionaries in Assam. Khiren Borgoyary and Dr. Pradip Narzary have recorded a report mentioned in the 'Vision' (A monthly news magazine of the A.B.M.S on page 3), that 'it was on 17th May 1947 midnight Rev. Wilf and Gwentyth Crofts left for Bongaigaon by train and took 28 km journey by bullock cart, for their destination. They walked through jungle, waded in streams and plodded across ploughed field and reached Tukrajhar.'⁵³ When they arrived at Tukrajhar village they knew none. They neither knew the language of the people nor their customs. During the period of Rev. Croft in 1947, Joborsingh Basumatary and Syamsingh Borgoyary of Ranisundari Baptist mission centre established Boronalbari Baptist mission centre and in the same year the No.2 Tukrajhar church planted a new church in Kumguri (Now Aie Powali). On 30th January 1948 Miss Jean Harry and Miss Fle Horwood arrived at Tukrajhar and joined Rev. Wilf and Mrs. Gwentyth Crofts.⁵⁴ Towards the end of 1949 Rev. Peter and Mrs. Win Ewing and two young siblings Len and Norman together with three other new women missionaries namely, Agnes Trudinger, Joyce Clarke and Peggy Soundy left Australia for India.⁵⁵ In May 1951 Rev. Wilf & Mrs. Gwentyth Crofts and Miss Harry left Tukrajhar for Baghpara to work among the Garo people. Miss Fle Horwood continued to stay at Tukrajahr with her ministry as a school teacher while taking care of the Friday church for women.⁵⁶ In the same year with their departure Miss Jean McLean and Rev. Peter N. Ewing (1951-1963) with his family joined Miss Fle Horwood.⁵⁷ For the overall growth of the Bodo churches, Rev. Peter N. Ewing introduced the first and second five year plans. With this method he succeeded to establish nine more new churches.⁵⁸ He always reminded the Bodo christians that they should become self-sufficient because one day the Australian missionaries would

leave them. Rev. Peter N. Ewing served the Bodo mission for three terms. But in his third term due to the ill- health of his wife he had to leave for Australia in 1963 leaving behind 26 churches.⁵⁹ Rev. Peter N. Ewing had the credit of getting G.B.B.C.U registered with the government in 1959.⁶⁰ In 1964 Rev. I. J Stoneton with family and Miss W.G Ridden arrived at Tukrajhar replacing Rev. Peter N. Ewing.⁶¹ He also continued to motivate the existing local churches to establish more new churches in their neighbourhood. Accordingly in the year 1965, the North Balajhar church was established and in the following year another church was established at Salbari. With the new policies of the government of India in 1968, the Restricted Area of Entry Bill was passed and it banned the entry of all foreigners to the North East region of India. Following this, both Rev. Stoneton and Miss Riddin had to leave Tukrajhar in 1968. In 1970 the Australian Baptist Mission in turn handed over the task to the local management and since then the Bodo Baptist mission in Goalpara has been known as the Goalpara Boro Baptist Church Union and most recently it is known as Boro Baptist Church Association.⁶²

The works in Mangaldai-Darrang area by the christian missionaries was first began by Rev. George Richard Kampfer the root for the birth of 'The Boro Baptist Convention' which had its beginning with the formation of Mangaldai Baptist Christian in 1914 by the American Baptist Mission. Later, it was changed to Darrang Baptist Christian Association.

The founding of the Baptist church in Darrang district had much connection with the Anglican congregation. After the death of Rev. Sydney Endle, a pioneer Anglican missionary, the new Anglican congregation was left unattended. During this period Sisuram Saikia of Tezpur and Alfred of Chapai near Mangaldai who were baptized by the American Baptist mission at Jorhat were sent out for evangelization. They had heard of the Anglican community at Borigaon village and planned to visit the same. They arrived at Borigaon village during the harvest season of 1913 and met and convinced the Anglican congregation about the Baptist Christian Mission. Soon they invited Rev. George Richard Kampfer to visit Borigaon village. Accordingly Rev. George Richard Kampfer came to Borigaon and baptized twenty one members (Some Anglican and some non christians) of the village on 27th January 1914.



Rev. George Richard Kampfer

Among the newly baptized christians one Ramanus Daimari, was re-baptized. It has been informed by Sapan Daimary⁶³ secretary of Borigaon Baptist church that Ramanus Daimari was known as Rothai Daimari and was a christian member in S.P.G Mission. But after he was re-baptized by Rev. George Richard Kampfer, he re-christened himself as Ramanus Daimari. He went on to become the first missionary pastor among the Bodos when he was ordained a pastor on 20th April 1924 at Borigaon Baptist church by Rev. Tanuram Saikia of Golaghat. He tried to spread the

message of gospel among the Bodos of Kamrup district and Tukrajhar areas. Rev. George Richard Kampfer and Ramanus Daimari paved the way for preaching and for the expansion of the kingdom of God. In the same year that is in 1914, several other churches were established at Edenbari, Ambagaon, Belguri and Phasia villages. By then 296 members were baptized in all. By the following year 1915, the total number of churches increased to 6 and the baptized members numbered 367.⁶⁴



Ramanus Daimari

Meanwhile Rev. George Richard Kampfer motivated and guided the new converts to form an association under the name and style: Mangaldai Baptist Christian Association. In 1915, the M.B.C.A held its first annual conference at Borigaon and the second at Ambagaon in 1916.⁶⁵ Sisuram Saikia and Sereluis Bhuborah both from Borigaon were selected the president and the secretary respectively. The church in Mongaldai sub-division grew steadily inspite of the lack of able leaders and proper supervision from Gauhati.



**Rev. G.R Kampfer at the 1st Annual Conference Hall of Mangaldoi Sabha, 1915
held at Borigaon Baptist Church, Udalguri (Assam)**

The other missionaries who associated with Rev. George Richard Kampfer were Rev. A.C. Bower from 1917 to 1918. It was during this period as per available record there were increased persecutions under the leadership of Dhanbar Deka, a mauzumdar (Revenue collector) of Bengbari Mauza (Revenue circle) on christians.⁶⁶ This was mitigated because of the initiative of Rev. A.C Bower. Rev. O.L Swanson was a missionary in the area from 1918-1919 and 1928-1929. He wrote a book named, “In villages Tea Gardens” where he mentioned about the experience of how field was so vast and growth of church was slow.⁶⁷ Rev. A Stephenson, Rev. A.J. Tuttle and Rev. A. David also worked in the area from 1919-1935. Dr. Victor H. Swerve served in the mission field from 1935 to 1936. He also was involved in the medical ministry at Harisinga. Rev. J.M. Ferve served in the area from 1936 to 1939. He stayed at Harisinga and helped the churches in training them in the word of God. Most of the time, they worked from Gauhati station. They also established a mission school at Borigaon which was later shifted to Harisinga.⁶⁸ While expanding their mission American Baptist Foreign Mission Society took the help of the Garo Baptist christians to develop the Bodo churches. The prominent Garo evangelists who dedicated themselves for the cause of the Bodo Christians were Silding Sangma, Nehersing Sangma and Hodon Sangma. It may be mentioned that during this period in

Nowgaon district a few Bodos were converted to christianity These new believers were Hilaues Basumatary, Dhaneswar Basumatary, Maniram Basumatary, Jonas Basumatary and Anupoma Basumatary.

After the Second World War A.B.F.M.S was not in a position to supervise those areas properly or initiate any new work. Thus in 1945, the A.B.F.M.S handed over the M.B.C.A to Baptist General Conference, U.S.A. The Baptist General Conference, U.S.A accepted the Boro Baptist churches as their mission field and sent Rev. J. Warren Johnson and Mrs. Ruth Johnson as resident missionary in 1946. It was Rev. Johnson who built the present mission centre at Harisinga.

In 1969 all the foreign missionaries were directed to leave India and all had to bid them adieu. Without missionaries the churches were like orphans without parents. So Khalason Muchahary of Borigaon Baptist church who was the headmaster of M.E school was invited to lead the churches⁶⁹ by the missionaries of the Baptist General Conference, U.S.A.⁷⁰

Rev. J. Warren Johnson and Mrs. Ruth Johnson were the first resident missionaries from Baptist General Conference to Harisinga. They stayed and rendered sacrificial services to the churches visiting from church to church encouraging and strengthening the believers in faith. They worked from March 1946-1950. After that they moved to Tezpur in 1950. Rev. Reuben Holm and Mrs. Edna Holm succeeded them and worked from September 1948-1962. Mrs. Connie Kratofil and Rev. Ernie Kratofil, (November 1960-August 1969) were very much interested in village level church and they visited the churches and encouraged the new churches and the believers. Rev. Paul Edwards and Dr. Laura Edwards (December 1950-August 1968) were interested in church planting and growth of the new churches. Dr. Laura Edwards also extended service at Baptist Christian Hospital, Harisinga. Following him Dr. Beatrice Mulford who was a missionary doctor served the poor people of the area through Baptist Christian Hospital Harisinga from November 1964 to 1967 November. Ms. Elsa (Knudsen) Morris also came as a missionary nurse serving the humanity through Baptist Christian Hospital Harisinga from March 1957- June 1979. Ms. Helen Bergfalk who was at Harisinga from August 1949-1977 had the heart in teaching the young people. She used to prepare lessons for Sunday school and Bible club and conduct vacation Bible classes. Ms. Grace Swanson August 1948- October

1968 and Ms. Arlene Peterson August 1948-October 1968 came as missionary teachers and both of them taught in the Zion Bible College, the then Zion Ziary Bible School. They also used to prepare Bible lessons for the young children for the Vacation Bible classes. Miss Joy Philips from 1947-1949 and Miss Earline J. Jensen from 1949-1952 were involved in medical ministry. Rev. & Mrs. Johnson (1951-1956) also taught in Harisinga High School. Miss L. Nelson (1964-1969) and Miss Betty Pierson worked as nurses in hospital.

The selfless sacrifice of the Baptist christian missionaries had their desired results. The Baptist christians were more successful in winning over the Bodos to christianity. Of all the denominations the Baptist church has the credit of bringing more conversion to Christianity than other denominations.

THE ANGLICAN MISSION

The Anglican Mission for the Bodos started in early 1860s from Tezpur in the district of Darrang (presently Sonitpur, Darrang and Udalguri). It was in the background of Captain J.T Gordan of the Anglican Church that the missionary works among the Bodos can be traced. As per record in 1840 some Bodos around Tezpur had embraced christianity whom Captain J.T Gordan admitted in his church. He founded the 'Kachari Mission' in 1847 with an objective to serve the indigenous Bodo people. Captain J.T Gordan utilized the help of two German missionary viz. Rev. C.H Hesselmeyer and G. Dauble.⁷¹ By 1850, the Church Mission Society was given the responsibility of spreading the gospel and extending the education system among the Bodos of Darrang district. But the death of Captain J.T Gordan had far impact as the mission work was paralyzed. At this juncture G. Dauble the second German missionary joined the American Baptist Mission. Since no missionary was available for any mission work, the Church Mission Society of Tezpur was passing through a hard time. Following this Rev. Robert Bland who was the chaplain of the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (S.P.G) at Gauhati, requested the S.P.G to look after the mission station at Tezpur. So in 1862, the Tezpur Mission Station was handed over to the S.P.G. Mission.⁷² After the death of Captain J.T Gordan, Rev. C.H Hesselmeyer took charge of the Kachari Mission. He committed himself to the work

of the Bodos but in 1869 he passed away. The burden of looking after the Kachari Mission felt on Rev. Sydney Endle who was till then an assistant to him.

Rev. Sydney Endle was deputed from England under the S.P.G. banner as the chaplain of the European community in the tea gardens in February 1864.⁷³ He transformed the Kachari Mission into a reality. He became the first full-time missionary worker for the Bodos. He brought a number of Bodos under the fold of the Anglican Mission through his work. He, for the first time established a full-fledged church at Bengbari near Harisinga with the help of the manager of the Koramor Tea-Estate in 1865. Mr. Pradeep Kumar Daimary had rightly spoken in his article, Rev. Sydney Endle: His Love for the Boros, “Rev. Sydney Endle established the first Boro Mondoli (church) at Bengbari in 1865 and dedicated the church building in 1873 for worship which was consecrated by Bishop Milan and named as St. Paul’s Church.”



St. Paul’s Church Bengbari, Estd. 1865

By 1881 the Anglican congregation increased to two hundred and ten.⁷⁴ This marked the beginning of the gospel work directly addressed to the Bodos who were mostly the adherents of their traditional religion Bathou Dhorom. He took special interest for the Bodos and their language. He undertook extensive village tours and established churches at Ghagra, Jamfrabari, Bengbari, Sengkhar, Kubirali, Sengahali etc of undivided Darrang district. It is also found recorded that some Bodos of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal under the Darjeeling Diocese of the Anglican Church had embraced christianity through Anglican mission.

THE SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Presbyterianism is one of the reformed traditions within protestanism that traces its origin to Scotland. It has its name taken from the presbyterian form of church government. It is governed by representative assemblies of elders. According to Presbyterian theology, God has the sovereignty and believes in the authority of the scriptures and the need for grace through faith in Christ.

Like other denominations the Presbyterian Church of Scotland also had its overseas mission. In 1867-1868 Dr. Norman McLeod of Barony and Dr. Watson of Dundee visited India and after they returned to Scotland they formed a mission society called "Mission to the Aborigine of Northern India" in 1869.⁷⁵ This development was whole heartedly accepted by the Church of Scotland. In 1868, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decided to open a mission field in Darjeeling in present West Bengal state. Accordingly in 1868 Rev. McFarlane was sent to Darjeeling to work among the Lepcha, Bhutia, Nepalis, Bodo and Rajbonshi of North Bengal.

The Church of Scotland had a vision for a mission among the Bodos. In this connection two German missionaries viz. Rev. Conrad Bechtold and Mr. Beutel volunteered to offer their services for Bodo mission. The Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland accepted their services and sent them as the first missionaries to the Bodo people. On 22nd October 1869 Rev. Conrad Bechtold and Mr. Beutel set sail for Calcutta.⁷⁶ They were granted free passages in a ship called The City of Madrid by Messr George Smith & Sons who were extra ordinarily generous. They reached Calcutta on 25th January 1870 and proceeded for Darjeeling and reached there on 31st January 1870 and soon went and lived with the Bodos at Pankabari area near Siliguri.

They engaged two persons to teach them the Bodo language one a Hindi speaking and the other Bodo who knew Hindi. They toured the entire Duar areas visiting Bodo villages. In the meantime Mr. Beutal was finding difficulty in Duar areas to keep going and went to Darjeeling. Nothing has been recorded on his later works except for his departure for home. Rev. Bechtold continued working in the Duar areas preaching among the Bodos. In 1870, he opened primary school at

Pankabari. By 2nd July 1871 there were ten to twelve students in the school but by 1872 the Mission Committee in Scotland directed him to go to Goalpara district.⁷⁷ Till then no success of conversion was reported among the Bodos of the Duars. In 1872 even though he was sent to Goalpara and wanted to establish a mission station, he had to return to his home country on health ground.

The history of the Bodo Christians of the Eastern Duars begins with the conversion of Jagat Singh Basumata a son of Baburam Basumata who was an ex-Bhutanese army.⁷⁸ In 1896 he was baptized by Rev. James Rae, an American Baptist Mission at Jalpaiguri town. He was from Bathou background. In 1897, Dr. John Anderson Graham a Scottish missionary of Darjeeling was given the responsibility of looking after the Duar areas. In 1898, he baptized several members of Jagat Singh Basumata's family. In the beginning, his brothers were against the Christian faith even to the extent that his younger brother threatened to kill him. But Jagat succeeded to bring all to Christ. All brothers were entrusted with missionary works. Jagat Singh Basumata was appointed as catechist under Naiman Kacchap at Odlabari in 1897. Jagat Singh Basumata was the first catechist among the Bodos. By 1900 Jagat Singh Basumata was able to bring twenty Bodo people to Christ. They were baptized by Rev. Duncan McMichael at Odlabari. In 1903-1904 Jagat Singh Basumata together with other six families left for Dudamari in Western Duars and settled at Dhontoli an interior place under Kumargram Thana in the Eastern Duars.

It may be mentioned that the Church of Scotland was rechristened as Eastern Himalayan Mission in 1903. The new name was adopted at the first historic meeting of the Eastern Himalayan Mission Council met on 22nd July 1903 at Goru Bathan at the initiative of Rev. Duncan McMichael. But unfortunately he had to leave India on health ground.

Meanwhile the newly settled families under the leadership of Jagat Singh Basumata established the first Bodo Presbyterian Church at Dhontoli in 1904.⁷⁹ The persons who joined Jagat Singh Basumata were Deb Singh Narjinary, Ujir Singh

Narjinary, Dalaram Singh Narjinari, Nayan Singh Mosahary, Raja Singh Narjinary and Keter Singh Narjinar.⁸⁰

Rev. Duncan McMichael was replaced by Rev. Daniel Kirkwood for a year. After he completed the year Mr. Tullock took charge of the mission for three months. Rev. James Charles Gillies Colvin succeeded him in 1905. In 1906, Rev. Daniel Res replaced him. In the following year Rev. Thomas Edward Tylor was sent to the Duars. Rev. Thomas Edward Tylor visited the Terai region extensively. While in the Terai region he suffered from 'Terai fever' and died on 25th December 1907. After his death no missionary was sent to the Duars for a year. Eventually Rev. Peter Milne was selected and appointed as the Chaplain to the Duars in 1907.

Jagat Singh Basumata visited several Bodo villages in the Eastern Duars preaching the message of Christ in simple village language. Having understood the message many Bodos accepted Christ. In this way, Jagat Singh Basumata established several churches in various villages. Some of the churches founded at his initiatives were Dubasri, Kamakhyaguri and Chok-Choka all in 1906, Mahakalguri in 1908, Bajugaon in 1911 and Narathili in 1913. He also established Scottish Presbyterian Churches at Tukurbari, Balajhar in 1908 and Burihar in 1911 but in 1913 these churches were converted to American Baptist Mission.

On 21st March 1914, Jagat Singh Basumata was ordained a pastor. The church expanded during this period rapidly. As per the council minutes of 24th July 1947, there were one hundred and fifty-five baptisms and one thousand one hundred fifteen members. Towards the close of 1913, the christian community in the Duars increased to two thousand five hundred and thirty. In 1920 Rev. Peter Milne resigned and was succeeded by Rev. Lauchlan Maclean. During this period, the church was growing rapidly and they needed more missionaries to look after the believers. Therefore Rev. Maclean approached Rev. Jitnal Narzinary who was then a teacher in the primary school at Dhantali to be the catechist of Mahakalguri Central Church. Initially, Rev.

Jitnal Narjinary hesitated but knowing fully the need of the church accepted the responsibility. Rev. Jitnal Narzinary was ordained a pastor of the entire Mech (Bodo) church in 1925. Rev Maclean could not serve the Bodo church for long as he resigned in 1921. In 1922 Rev. W.W Fwrrie succeeded Rev. Maclean. After nearly five years that is in 1928 Rev. Fwrrie was transferred to the Kurseong-Terai area and later he was succeeded by Rev. A.F William. In 1928 Dalkar Church and in 1937 Taleswarguri church was established respectively. This was how the church in the Eastern Duars expanded.

During the sixties of the last century some misunderstanding within the Mech (Bodo) church surfaced which later took an ugly turn. The entire Eastern Duars Church was affected. It was an attempt to divide Eastern Duar Church into four divisions by Mr. Michael Basumata who then was the headmaster of Mahakalguri Mission High School. On the other side Rev. Jitnal Narjinary the legendary Pastor was not in favour of division. He wanted the entire Eastern Duars Mech (Bodo) church to remain intact as one entity. He was the one who moulded and consolidated the Mech (Bodo) Church. Therefore, he recommended to the church council to settle the matter through ballot. It was accepted and carried out but the result was indecisive as both the parties secured equal votes. However, the Church Council had its prerogative and divided the Mech (Bodo) church into four units (Krik-session) which was against the wish of the party led by Rev. Jitnal Narzinary. The result was such that the entire Mech (Bodo) church was divided into two groups and a vast majority of the Mech (Bodo) church sided with Rev. Jitnal Narjinary.

Rev. Jitnal Narzinary with his followers founded a new church on 5th February 1970 and christened it “The Eastern Duars Independent Presbyterian Church of Northern India” which was popularly known as Presbyterian Independent Church. The newly founded church held its first council at Kamakyaguri on 15th February 1970 where Rev. Jitnal Narzinary was made the first moderator. Rev. Jitnal Narzinary was professionally a primary school teacher. With his professional excellence and his capacity for networking and social involvement he came to the limelight and reached him to an escalating height of success. He was also socially involved with many intellectuals. The government of West Bengal recognized his service and encouraged him to take up other social activities for peace, literacy and social transformation.

LUTHERAN MISSION

The advent of the Lutheran Mission among the Bodos has much relation with the Santal Mission of the Northern Church to which two missionaries namely Lars Olsen Skrefsrud from Norway and Hans Peter Boerrsen from Denmark were deputed. These two missionaries were the ones who brought the gospel to the Bodos of western Assam along with the Santals. Skrefsrud and Boerrsen laid great stress on working through indigenous personnel.⁸¹ According to the report, the Indian Home Mission established a Santal colony near Dingdingia in the district of Goalpara (now Kokrajhar) Assam, with the Santal immigrants from Bihar in 1880.⁸² On 8th February 1881, Rev. Boerrsen came to the colony with forty two Santal families. After them another thirteen families arrived with Hezekia Das, a teacher at the Ebenizer Boys School, Dumka.⁸³ These families spread over five villages within the colony. They built a church in a village called Thakurpur which means ‘the village of God’. This became the first church in the colony. They made Thakurpur as the headquarters of the colony till 1892 which was later shifted to Grahampur in 1892. There were scattered Bodo villages within the vicinity of the colony. Some of the Bodo villages were Shyamaguri, Silpur, Khoyarghutu, Mazadabri, Luisipur, Failaguri, Rangagaon, Jacobpur, Boragari now called Thelabani, Kachugaon etc. Together with the Santals the missionaries also started spreading the gospel among the Bodos in the colony. Several families accepted christianity while several others left the colony for fear of being converted.

The idea of spreading the gospel message among the Bodos developed because many Bodos also settled within the colony. As per information available, Teklo Boro (or Basumatary) was the first Bodo to be converted by the Santal Mission. His wife and two children were also baptized by Siram Pastor on 8th January 1888. However, Olav Hodne put this date to 7th January 1888.⁸⁴ After them several other Bodos also accepted the new faith. Some of the new converts were Dorkanto, Sitaram and Dabaru. Among them Dorkanto and Sitaram studied at Ebenizer Boys School, Dumka. The church grew steadily and the numbers kept increasing. Rev. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud passed away on 11th December 1910. Rev. Johannaes Gausdal from Norway replaced Skrefsrud in the Bodo evangelization after a gap of five years.

In order to feed the local church one Ratia Basumatary, son of Teklo Boro (or Basumatary) became the first Bodo pastor of the N.E.L.C after he was ordained on 5th January 1911. Similarly, Dabaru Boro was ordained on 6th December 1914 as per the record of the Panji published by the N.E.L.C. After his ordination, Dabaru had to take care of the Bodo christians in the colony but unfortunately he passed away two and a half years later. The responsibility of taking care of the Bodo congregation in the colony fell on Dorkanto. He had to shoulder the responsibility inspite of his old age condition.

As per oral information provided by Dr. Manjil Basumatary of Gossaigaon, a decision was made to establish a church at Rajadabri but even after three years of its existence no conversion was possible.⁸⁵ Therefore they moved to the colony and established the first Bodo church of the N.E.L.C at Shyamaguri in 1914. But outside the colony missionary works continued and by 1922 five small congregations were established viz. Mandari, Pattakata, Kolabari, Gumurgaon and Panbari. It may be mentioned that there were two hundred christians inside the colony by the year 1922. In the same year several mission centres were opened at Gaurang (near Kokrajhar), Bongaigaon and Parkijuli of then Kamrup. At that time Rev. Holger Winding, who was a missionary from Denmark was working for the Santal Mission.

He was joined by Rev. Aksel Kristiansen, in 1927. Rev. Holger Winding continued to work for the Santals while Rev. Aksel Kristiansen fully committed himself to look after the Bodo church. The Bodo christians by then were found in many villages such as Rajadabri, Nangdorbari, Patakata, Kolabari, Gumurgaon, Gaurang, Dumbajhar, Bhatarmari, Karigaon, Patgaon, Maktaigaon, Panbari, Hatigarh, Jiaguri, Borguri, Jaraguri, Raimona, Serfanguri, Goladangi etc. Rev. Aksel Kristiansen resided at Joema and studied Bodo language and culture. In the history of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church, he was the first full- fledged missionary for the Bodo christians. Rev. Aksel Kristiansen was the person who established the permanent mission station at Gaurang in 1927.⁸⁶ In 1929, the mission bungalow was completed and without wasting much time he moved into it. He also started to build a church at Gaurang with asbestos roof and walls. It was completed in 1938. In 1934, Miss Bessie Fischer another lady missionary from Denmark joined in the Bodo Mission field.⁸⁷ She initiated work among the women fold. It was in 1938 another mission station came up at Bongaigaon where Rev. and Mrs. Malme were posted.

Anders Malmes arrived in India way back in 1935 and worked at Grahampur and Santipur initially.⁸⁸ The missionaries extended their work to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang and Lakimpur. During the tenure of Rev. and Mrs. Malme for convenience of evangelical work, the church areas were divided into two circles- Bongaigaon Circle and Gaurang Circle, the Champa River being the boundary between the two.⁸⁹ But the faithful were placed under one district church namely, Bongaigaon District Church Council with its headquarters at Gaurang Mission. Today Bongaigaon District Church Council has been renamed as Bongaigaon Diocese which comprises of eight circles and one mission station (Arunachal). The eight circles are Gaurang circle, Bongaogaon circle, Gothaibari circle, Mothambil circle, Parkijuli circle, Udalguri circle, Gohpur circle and Dhemaji circle.⁹⁰

From Bongaigaon Rev. Malme retired to Grahampur. It was there he breathed his last. He was laid to rest there by the side of the church building. After the death of Rev. Malme, Miss Sofie Nessel was arranged to be stationed at Bongaigaon. One does not come across any tangible record with regard to mission work by Miss Sofie Nessel. The death of Rev. Malme and the return of Rev. Kristiansen back home, the chapter of pioneering missionaries came to a close. In 1941, two missionaries from Denmark, Rev. Haokan Holvosrud and Mrs. Anna Holvosrud came to Gaurang. In 1942 these two missionaries visited Kamrup and Darrang areas and understanding the evangelical need a district council of Kamrup and Darrang was formed. This was also followed by a joint meeting of all the district councils at Kokrajhar leading to the formation of Bodo Church Council. It was in that year Mr. Bhubendra Narzary and Tarini Iswary were ordained pastors and posted at Bongaigaon and Gaurang respectively.⁹¹ It was also in the same year Shyamaguri church was incorporated with the Bodo Church Council. A third mission station was also established at Parkijuli near Bhutan border under present Baksa district of Assam in 1942. In that year Rev. David and Mrs. Westborg Norwegian by nationality also joined the Santal Mission and worked among the Bodos. Rev. David in those days was stationed at Gaurang and later at Bongaigaon and used to visit Parkijuli at intervals.⁹² By 1951, the construction of mission station was completed and began to stay at Parkijuli. The name Parkijuli is associated with Late Maguram Moshahary. He was a preacher who preached in the northern part of Kamrup from 1940-1941. He used to stay at a village Seapani. But in

1942 he together with his family shifted to the northern part of Parki stream and named the village as Parkijuli.

In the beginning, he used to conduct the fellowship in the veranda and later in the cowsheds. As the number of believers grew, he built a church. Thus that church became the first N.E.L.C church in the northern part of Kamrup. On 1st July Maguram Mosahary and Upendra Mosahary were ordained by Gausdal.⁹³ In order to shepherd the increasing believers the council ordained Moshahary as a Pastor in 1945. From 1945 to 1960 he looked after the N.E.L.C churches around that area. The church kept expanding. In 1951, one Joseph Goyary founded a church at Simolguri in the present Dhemaji district. On 25th November 1947, Malsing Mosahary and 13th November 1952 Biswanath Narzary was ordained and thus the great need of workers was partially fulfilled in the Bodo field.

In the later years several other N.E.L.C churches were established such as Sonapur (1954), Gogamug-Lagasung (1959), Jorigan (1964) and Koupatoni (1968). In order to minister these churches on 16th February 1958, Durga Chandra Mosahary was ordained. A new circle of Darrang-North Lakimpur was also formed. Mahendra Narzary an evangelist from Gandabil was ordained for pastoral ministry in January 1959. During this year, Rev. Malsing Mosahary and Rev. Upendra Mosahary were working in the Bongaigaon and Gaurang circles respectively. Joseph Goyary was also ordained on 15th June 1969. Another new circle of North Lakimpur was formed. It was that year the declaration of the whole North East India as Restricted Area came around and this forced the christian missionaries to leave their mission fields. Following this, the Lutheran missionaries handed over all the responsibilities to the native missionaries in 1969. The departure of the foreign missionaries led to reorganization of the Bodo Lutheran church. Bodo Lutheran Christians elected their own Bishop to guide the local Pastors to keep going with the mission activities among the Bodos. In July 1984, Gaurang circle was divided into two-Udalguri and Gohpur and the North Lakimpur.⁹⁴ In the history of the Lutheran church, an event cannot be forgotten when in 1970 the church was divided into two. A group in the same church broke away from the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church and called themselves National Boro Lutheran Church (N.B.L.C) The expansion of the church today is the fruit of the hard works of the missionaries. By 1985, the Bodo members of the

N.E.L.C were about 13,036 members. And now it has increased to 27174 excluding the 712 minors and newly baptized Christians.

CATHOLIC CHURCH

The advent of Catholic missionaries in Assam goes back to the year 1626 when two Jesuit priests visited the Assam province and stayed at Gauhati. The Bandel Chronicles of the Augustinian Monastery states that in 1682 at Rangamati there was a flourishing community of seven thousand Bodo christians in the Bodo Kachari Kingdom.⁹⁵ Catholic missionaries are believed to have come to Bondasil in Cachar district in 1790.⁹⁶ But christianity among Bodos can be only well traced from the 19th century when protestant churches of different denominations started their missionary activities among the Bodos. Till then, the Catholic Church did not have any contact with the Bodo tribe. It was in 1928 Bodo and Adivasi from Udalguri invited Fr. Piaseki who was known as 'The Lion of the Brahmaputra' to visit Udalguri area.⁹⁷ He visited several villages and baptized some Bodos of Udalguri area. However, till 1933-1934 that no work of any conversion to Catholic Church is found recorded. It was from 1933 that real evangelization began to take place in Mongoldai area. Fr. Alessi and Fr. Ravalico toured extensively in the Bodo areas and in 1933 Fr. Ravalico baptized a few Bodos of Darrang district.⁹⁸ It was around this time that a few families in Kumarikatha and some families of Kagrabari area both in Kamrup district accepted Catholic faith through Fr. Scuderi. But in Goalpara district till then, no Catholics were found. The Baptists and the Lutherans were the predominant denominations in the district. With the passage of time some misunderstandings took place in the Nangdorbari Lutheran church which resulted in the breaking away of a section of the Lutheran believers who eventually joined the Catholic Church. The breakaway group was led by Phillip Phulsing Basumatary who went to Gauhati and invited the catholic priests to visit their village. Fr. Scuderi accordingly visited the village and accepted them in the catholic fold. They were four families in all and they became the first catholic community in Goalpara area. Soon Phillip Phulsing Basumatary built the first Catholic Church at Nangdorbari village in 1933.⁹⁹ He also converted two new families of Jagwrsing Basumatary and Paulus Borgoyary. By 1934-1935 the Catholic congregation increased manifold in different places with the help of Gendra

Champramary. Gendra Champramary was an orphan from Bengal who was sent to Gauhati in 1934 and stayed there till 1935 and was baptized and sent to Tezpur for some religious training by Fr. Orestes Marengo the Rector of Gauhati.¹⁰⁰ When he returned he was made a catechist. Goalpara was the first field for the Catholic missionaries. Their efforts resulted in the foundation of catholic churches in villages such as Khagrabari, Digoldong and Ranisundri. Further in the villages like Patgaon, Jolaigaon (Bilaspara) and Dandupur (South of Kokrajhar) churches came up. There is also another village south of the present Champa river bridge on the national highway where a church but was established but washed away by the river. In north Kamrup district to the north of Doomni tea estate due to the efforts of Fr. Guido Colussi, a few Catholics were settled in the forest land and this led to the establishment of the present village of Bangaon.¹⁰¹ But the most important person behind the Bodo evangelization and its expansion was Fr. Marengo who then was the Rector of Gauhati.¹⁰² He mastered the Bodo language and toured extensively in the Bodo heartland and won over many souls to Catholic faith. Even today Bishop Marengo is known as the Father of the Bodo Catholics. Fr. Marengo left Barpeta in 1936 and was replaced by Fr. Bonomiwas for a brief period. In the same year Fr. Michael Devalle and Fr. Thomas Lopez came to Barpeta. In 1939 Fr. Ernest Zanon was put in charge of Barpeta mission. He also learned the Bodo language which helped him in his evangelization work. Meanwhile in Fr. Zanon was sent to Sonada for a year. After his return to Barpeta in 1947 the church under Barpeta mission station progressed steadily. Fr. Felix Bollini and Fr. Aiuso also assisted Fr. Zanon in the evangelical expansion of Barpeta mission. In 1953, Fr. Remus Morra took over the charge of Barpeta mission from Fr. Zanon. He was a man of vision and foresight. He gave much importance to evangelization among the Bodos and realized the need to reach out to them through education. He was joined by Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB in 1956 with the idea of opening a mission for the Bodos. He worked under Fr. Remus for eleven years touring extensively in the Bodo dominated areas. As planned in 1965, he was entrusted with the task of opening a new mission. He selected Bengtol as a centre for his mission work. Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB arrived at Bengtol on 24th June 1966 with three masons, one carpenter and a few labourers. He had a very humble beginning as there was nothing to begin with. He started to stay in a little hut from where he launched out his mission work. In July 1967, he was joined by Fr. John O' Day as an Assistant Parish priest. Bengtol thus became the first Catholic Mission

for the Bodos located on the north-eastern side of present Kokrajhar town and 20 kilometres north of Bongaigaon railway station and 25 kilometres south of Gaylegphung (Bhutan) and to the west of the river Aie. The area is inhabited mainly by the Bodos, Santals, Oraon, Garos, Rajbongshi, Bengalis and a few other communities.



Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB

Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB was the valiant missionary of lower Assam who is known as ‘Onsula Father Bwrai’. He loved the Bodos, and they loved him too. He left Assam in August 1969. After his departure Fr. Mathew Kadavunkal SDB joined Bengtol mission. He was transferred from Bengtol in December 1970. After him Fr. John Mulumgotra, a diocesan priest came to help Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB in April 1971. In July 1971 Fr. Peter Bianchi SDB arrived at Bengtol. The following year he was appointed the Parish Priest of the newly born parish of Soraibil. He looked after the Soraibil parish till May 1974. In June 1972 Fr. Kulundaiswamy another diocesan priest came to help Fr. Zubizarreta.¹⁰³ Fr. Edward

D' Souza SDB joined Bengtol Mission on 1st August 1974. He also mastered the Bodo language and mobilized the youth through his missionary zeal. The 4th June 1976 is another red-letter day in the annals of Bengtol Catholic Mission as it marked the beginning of St. Mary's Convent, to be run by the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (M.S.M.H.C).

It was Mother Mary Rose Thapa, the then Mother General of the M.S.M.H.C who sent two sisters viz. Rev. Sr. Mary Surin and Rev. Sr. Anne Scaria to Bengtol. They were guided by Rev. Sr. Josephine Lakra, the superior of St. Mary's Convent (Barpeta Road) for two years. On 8th January 1977, Sr. Mary Surin fell sick and expired in the same year. In the following year on 7th March 1978 Rev. Sr. Carmela Lakra was appointed the first superior of St. Mary's Convent Bengtol. She was replaced by Rev. Sr. Seraphine Lakra. After her Rev. Sr. Rose Joseph became the third superior of the convent who had to shoulder the responsibility of the school as headmistress. On 25th May 1982, Rev. Fr. Joseph Palamthattel SDB another young and enthusiastic Silesian priest joined Bengtol Catholic community. He also learned the Bodo language and committed himself to the Bodo cause. He gave a scientific explanation to his mission work. Rev. Bro Jerome Lyngdoh SDB also came to Bengtol in the same year as Fr. Joseph Palamthattel SDB. He re-organized the boarding rules and regulation and gave his selfless and dedicated service for the young borders. In March 1991, he was transferred to Shillong. Rev. K.O Chacko SDB was also sent to this beautiful mission soon after his priestly ordination on 1st June 1985. He was proficient in Assamese and Hindi. He also picked up the Bodo language within a very short span of time. Utilizing his proficiency in languages he was able to extend pastoral care to all sections of the parishioners. In the absence of the parish priest Fr. Joseph Maria Zubizarreta SDB, he shouldered the responsibility of the parish.

The Catholic Church kept ever expanding and it was in 1984 that the Gossaigaon Mission was started by Fr. Mathew Kottaram.¹⁰⁴ He carried out his missionary activities for fourteen years. On 1st January 1986, another mission station was opened by Fr. Edward D' Souza at Dotma in Kokrajhar district.¹⁰⁵

The Bengtol Mission was one such centre where different missionaries came and had experience on evangelization among the Bodos. On 22nd March 1987 Rev.

Basil Koikara SDB, a very qualified young priest came to work in the Bengtol Mission. He helped in the mission till June 1988. He was replaced by Fr. Ronald SDB another young priest. He helped in the school and boarding section. Later he carried out the village touring programmes. In 1991, Rev. Fr. P.J. James SDB another very qualified young priest joined the Bengtol Mission. During this period, another mission centre came up at Bashbari where Fr. Christopher Benedict worked as the founder parish priest. He worked in the inhospitable conditions where he suffered from malaria and died in 1991. Soon a part of Bashbari parish was carved out and Bhowlaguri mission was opened. The Jesuits also established a mission stations at Mornai.

Meanwhile in Udalguri area of present Udalguri district in 1951 Fr. Guido Colussi opened a mission at Tangla. Initially it was looked after from Gauhati and later from Barpeta. Besides looking after the Adivasi congregations, it also catered to the spiritual requirements of the Bodo Catholics. In 1967, a new mission was started at Udalguri, specially addressed to the Bodos by Fr. Venturoli. With the opening of a mission station at Udalguri, the number of Catholics multiplied. In the years that followed several other mission stations came up at places like Mangaldai, Ambagaon, Rowta, Dimakuchi and Mazbat where the Bodo Catholics could participate in the worship services. Today, the Bodo Catholics are spread out in the dioceses of Tezpur, Bongaigaon, Diphu, Gauhati and Dibrugarh.

In conclusion, one can be of the opinion that the christian missionaries of different denominations arrived in Assam in Bodo areas to spread christianity. Their efforts bore fruits as tens and thousands accepted christianity. The Bodo converts retained their denominations' identity while claiming themselves as Bodo Christians. After the departure of the foreign missionaries, the church belonging to different denominations continued to grow as the local Bodo Christian leaders kept the evangelization alive. Today a sizable population of the Bodo community practice Christianity. Different denominations that have presence in the Bodo populace are the Baptist, the Anglican, the Lutheran and the Roman Catholics. Besides smaller denominations like Methodist, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, Seventh day Adventist, Christian Revival Church, Believers Church and Independent Churches also have a sizable Christian populations.

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