

# ROLE OF BRITISH MISSIONARY IN KARBI ANGLONG: A STUDY OF KARBI-BRITISH MISSIONARY RELATIONS.

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During Colonial Rule the British subjugated several areas of North-East Region at times. In 1838 the Mikir Hills came under the control of the British. Then the British officials in association with American Baptist Foreign Mission published a few/some valuable books and articles on Karbi culture & language, customs, history etc.

In 1836 Baptist missionaries first came in North-East region. Nathan Brown, O'T Kattar and his wife stepped in the Brahmaputra valley with a mission to spreading & preaching Christianity in Assam towards the South-East Asia. The Baptist selected Sadia as the mission centre. The missionaries like Miles Bronson, U.W.Clerk started operation in spreading & preaching Christianity in some tribal populated areas of Assam. A few Karbis were initiated in Christianity a century ago. In 1885 Tung Krung Timung and Karabamon Engti fled for America along with a Baptist missionary. K. Engti returned to India while Tung Krung Timung did not. The successors of K. Engti have settled in Golaghat. In 1859 the Karbis, for the first time came in contact with Christianity. American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) sent C.F. Talman and his wife to Nagaon and its neighbouring areas for spreading and preaching Christianity among the tribals. The then Karbi Anglong was a dense forest inhabited by wild and dangerous animals. There was a terrible outbreak of malarial fever. They were attacked with malaria before operation. In 1863 Rev. E.P. Scott and his wife came to Assam for preaching Christianity among the Karbis. They too, were attacked with malaria and had to go back to the States. In 1871 Rev. R.E. Neibor and his wife shouldered the responsibility for missionary work of this region. Being confined in Nogaon, they could not come and contact with the Karbis. In 1890 American Baptist Missionary appointed Rev. P.E. Moore for Assam mission. After coming to Assam Moore got married to Mr. Charlott Pursell. At the first instance, they established the Mission Centre at Nogaon. Later they realised that a mission centre to be set up at Karbi Anglong for preaching of Christianity among the Karbis. Accordingly they established a mission centre at Krungjeng, a small village near present Kollanger. They appointed Mr. Sherlock, a youths religious preacher. After a few years John Mases Carvell, an American youth came to Assam just to help in missionary work. John married to Ms. Amy of Nogaon Girls' School and joined hands with Rev. P.E. Moore for missionary work. Krungjeng was unhygienic and not a congenial place to live in, so in 1897, they shifted the mission centre to Tika Hills. That was the arrival of Asom Christian missionaries at Tika Hills.

Rev. P.E. Moore and J.M. Carvell are the first Christian missionaries who came to Tika Hills in the midst of wild animals. They used to spend their days by putting tent in deserted Hills. The Karbis got frightened seeing the two strangers. Gradually they made them friendly with their cordial expressions and behaviours. They learnt Karbi language and started communicating with them. Further they set up a primary school, primary health centre and a church at Tika. The erstwhile construction of church is still in existence at Tika. It is worth mentioning that in 1997, the centenary celebration of Baptist church was accomplished with pomp and glee in that church.

Primary school was set up by the missionaries centering round the church of Tika. Thenkursing Engti was the first teacher of that school. Engti contributed significantly to the field of education and religious works of the missionaries. Chhemsensing Engti, the worthy son of the worthy father, Thenkursing Engti has been regarded as the founder of Karbi Anglong district.

Missionaries did a lot for the development of Karbi language and spreading of education among the Karbis besides spreading of Christianity. Both the Padres devoted themselves for setting up of schools, health centres, spreading of gospel. They also set up one mini printing press with a light weight printing machine that could be lifted and carried by a lone person. They prepared, produced and published holy books and school textbooks.

As Meles Bronson contributed towards the development of modern Assamese language & literature, so also Moore and Carvell significantly for the development of modern Karbi scripts, language and literature. In 1875 missionaries published first Karbi book named "DHARAM AARNAM AFRANG IKTHAN" in Assamese script. There after books on Karbi language were printed with Roman scripts. In 1891 Ms. Persel published "Arleng Alaam" (Karbi Path).

In 1903 Baptist mission with the help of Sirdocka and Thingkursing Engti published Alerong Alaam (Flee Free Akitap). In 1904 Rev. J.M. Carvell in association with Thengkursing Engti published Arleng Alaam (Ang Bang Akitap). Rev. Carvell with the help of P.E.Morre published Arleng Kalakha Akitap (Genit). Even in 1904 American Baptist Mission Union published a book named "Birota Keme" (Shuva Sambad) written by Majendra Sahib. Moreover, the missionaries published books Ning Arjan" (Hriday Darpan), Chhining Puthimi in Karbi language. They also published two monthly magazine titled 'Birta' (Batori) and 'Thengtom' (Bonti). In 1925. G.D. Wakar published "A Dictionary of Mikir Language. In fact, Christian missionaries paved the way for the development of Karbi language & literature.

Both Moore and Carvell families from Tika Hills worked with great zeal for the spreading of Christianity in weal and woe. They lit the light of education among the Karbi people. It is regrettable that on August 1, 1897 Mrs. Amy Carvell passed away and she was buried at Tika cliff. Two more graves were also there. The sudden demise of Mrs. Corvell made them mournful momentarily but their ever-increasing missionary zeal was not abated. During that year Rev. Carvell came in contact with Alice Parkar, an English lady and got her married on December 13, 1897. In that year they initiated six Karbi people in Christianity. With the help of those

people they built up a temporary church at Tika. The number of associate members of the church was limited to 20/25 only. But in 1903 more than hundred male and female were initiated in Christianity. With the increase of population churches were founded in Omteli, Hamran, Koka, Baithalansu, Omchera, Omro, Borthoi etc. and in suburbs of Tika.

Missionaries were not off the danger. Rev. Moore and his wife left Tika for some days for treatment. However, they came back again at Tika. In 1907 Carvell and his wife went on leave. In their absence, in 1908 Mrs. Moore died. She was buried-at Taka. Rev. Moore alone had to keep on doing the missionary i works. In 1909 he had to return to America for the deteriorating health. Meanwhile Rev. Carvell and his wife joined again in missionary works immediately after their return. But Mrs. Carvell left for America with her seven-year-old son in 1912. The missionaries of Tika weathered another storm to emerge. On 15 October, 1916 the Mission house containing medicines, official documents, library books etc. burnt to ashes by thunderbolt. The ruins are still found there. The missionaries lost enthusiasm after the calamities found there for rebuilding the mission centre. In 1917 missionaries left Tika for good. By all means missionaries kept on doing missionary works centering round Nogaon. In 1919 Rev. Moore left India while Carvell remained.

Rev. Carvell was closely associated with Karbis with heart and soul. Even he expressed his wish to breathe his last there in Karbi Anglong. After his retirement, Rev. Carvell devoted himself in missionary works independently for more than twenty months. He was attacked with malarial fever while Carvell desired to build a house at the cliff of Tika Hills. On 29 October, 1925 Carvell died. According to his cherished wish, he was buried by the side of his wife's grave. His memorial has been engraved with: "MANUHOK PREM BILALE ISHWARAK PREM KORA HOI".

During the pre-independent period the Tika Hill was the centre of education, language & literature and religious place of Karbi Anglong. The spreading of education and Christianity among the Karbis was started from the Tika Hill. Probably the literacy rate is higher in Tika Hill than that of other parts of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. Indian Civil Servants, Assam Civil Servants / Police Servants and other allied officials have been recruited from this small village of Karbi Anglong. The contribution of American missionaries for all round development of Tika region is undeniable.

In later days, the works, reference books, dictionaries prepared & published by the British officials and missionaries were of great help to the writers and research scholars. In 1974 Padmashire Rong Rong Terang, the author of "Karbi Lam Techham" (Karbi-Assamese dictionary) made a fair comment — "Eta Jatir na-koi abhidhan ekhon sankalan kora duruha kaam jodio Wakar Sahabor "A Dictionary of the Mikir language" naamor bahumulia granthai mok baat dekhuale aru Sankalanar Kaam Sohojtar hol".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rongphar, B. (2005) Karbi Anglongor Rajnaitik Itihas, *Phu Phu Publication*, Diphu, P- 35

Some important books published by the British officials are listed below:

- i) A Descriptive Account of Assam (1841) & Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal Vol. XVIII (1849)- by William Robinson.
- ii) Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam (1855) by Major John Watler.
- iii) Notes on Northern Cachar, JASB, vol.XXIV (1855) by Lt. R. Stewart.
- iv) Descriptive Anthology of Bengal (1872) by Col. E.T. Delton
- v) Specimens of the Languages of India (1874) by-Sir George Campbel
- vi) A vocabulary in English and Mikirs (1878) by - Rev. R.E. Neighbor.
- vii) Locality and Population of the Tribes between the Brahmaputra and Ningthi Rivers(1880)by G.H. Diamont
- viii) A Statistical Account of Assam (1879) by -J.S. Cotton
- ix) A Gazetteer of India (1881) by Sir W.W. Hunter
- x) The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley (1900) by Lt. Col. L. A. Wadelor
- xi) Linguistic Survey of India, vol. III, Part II (1902) by –Dr. G.A. Pearson
- xii) A Vocabulary in English and Mikirs (1878) and An English Mikir Vocabulary (1904) by Edward Stek and Sirdoka Perin.
- xiii) The Report of the Censers (6<sup>th</sup> Chapter) (1881, 1891, 1901) - by in E.A. Gait & B.C. Elen  
The Report of the Census (1881, 1991 & 1901)
- xiv) The Mikirs (1908) b y – Charles J. Lalaye.

The history published by the British is found to be indispensable and useful for Karbi related works! During the 19th century, the written scripts and printing of Karbi language were first introduced by the British officials. Rapid progress and development in socio-economic life of the Karbis were noticed in this century. During this period a gang of Karbi educated englightend, youths came forth for the development of Karbi society. The Karbi forum named "KARBI ADARBAR" was formed under the leadership of Sirsing Teron, Nihang Rongphar, Khorsing Terong, Song Bey, Semson Sing Engti. The forum demanded for the Separate Karbi Anglong District for the Karbis and submitted a memorandum to Robert Niel Reed, the then Governor of Assam detailing the socio-economic problems and their utter frustration. No mention is made in the history about the contribution of the Karbis in the Indian freedom movement. The impact of freedom struggle on the Karbis was not at all noticeable. That is why, the few Karbi people were busy struggling to form an Autonomous District Council. The relation between the Karbis and the British was a formal one. But the spirit

of nationalism took birth in the mind of the Karbis in the British regime. Of late, this spirit helped the Karbis to achieve an autonomous District Council and fulfill their hopes and dreams of coming generation and making it into one of the most prosperous and glorious areas of the country.

## References

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